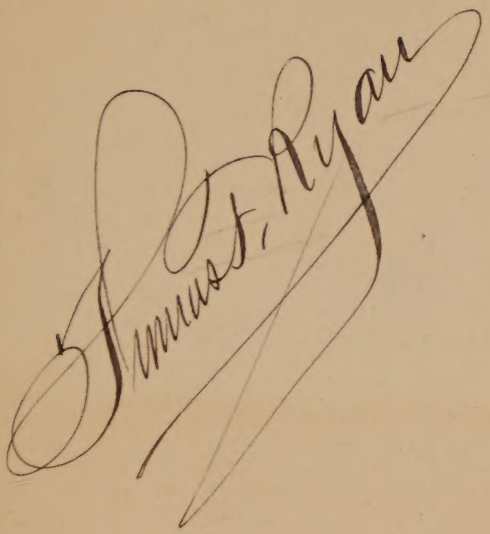
HOMEBURG MEMORIES

GEORGE FITCH



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Finally the bass catches up with the cornets.
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Homeburg Memories

BY
GEORGE FITCH
AUTHOR OF "AT GOOD OLD SIWASH,"
"SIZING UP UNCLE SAM," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
IRMA DÉRÈMEAUX

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TO

MY FATHER

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Homeburg Memories

I

THE 4:11 TRAIN

In Which the World Comes Once a Day to Visit Homeburg

HEL-LO, Jim! Darn your case-hardened old hide, but I'm glad to see you! Wait till I unclamp my fingers from this suit case handle and I'll shake hands. Whoa — look out!! That's the fourth time that chap's tried to tag me with his automobile baggage truck. He'll get me yet. I wish I were a trunk, Jim. Why aren't they as kind to the poor traveler as they are to his trunk? I don't see any electric truck here to haul me the rest of the way into New York. It's a long,

long walk to the front door of this station, and my feet hurt.

That's the idea. Let the porter lug that suit case. I'd have hired one myself, but I was afraid I couldn't support him in the style you fellows have made him accustomed to. It was mighty nice of you to come down and meet me, Jim. I've been standing here for five minutes in this infernal mass meeting of locomotives, trying to keep out from underfoot, and getting myself all calm and collected before I surged out of this howling forty-acre depot and looked New York in the eye. It's nothing but a plain case of rattles. I have 'em whenever I land here, Jim. Dump me out on Broadway and I wouldn't care, but whenever I land back in the bowels of a Union Station I'm a meek little country cousin, and I always want some one to come along and take me by the hand.

It's the fault of your depots. They're the biggest things you have, and it isn't

fair for you to come at me with your biggest things first. Every time I start for New York I swear to myself that I'm going to go into a fifty thousand dollar dining-room full of waiters far above my station, and tuck my napkin in my collar, just to show I'm a free-born citizen; and I'm going to trust my life to crossing policemen, and go by forty-story buildings without even flipping an eye up the corner and counting the stories by threes. I'm mighty sophisticated until I hit the city and get out into a depot which has a town square under roof and a waiting-room so high that they have to shut the front door to keep the thunder storms out. Then I begin to shrink. And by the time I've walked from Yonkers or thereabouts, clean through the station and out of a two-block hallway, with more stores on either side than there are in all Homeburg, and have committed my soul to the nearest taxicab pirate, I feel like a cheese mite in the great hall of Karnak.

No, sir; when I get into a big city depot, I'm a country Jake, and I need a compass and kind words. I've suffered a lot from those depots. I missed a train in Washington once because I figured it would take me only ten minutes to go from my hotel to the train. But I counted only the distance to the front door of the Union Station. By the time I'd journeyed on through the fool thing, my train had gone. Once I missed a train in the Boston station because I didn't know which one of the thirty tracks my train was on. I guessed it was somewhere to the right, and I guessed wrong. It was twenty-four tracks away to the left, and I couldn't get back in time. So I went into their waiting-room, which is as big as a New England cornfield and has all the benches named for various towns. I had to stand up two hours because I couldn't find the Homeburg bench.

I'm an admirer of big cities, Jim, and I wouldn't have you take a foot off your

Woolworth building, or a single crashity!! bang!! out of your subways, but I wish there was a little more coziness in your depots. Why, at Homeburg I'm nearer the train at my house than I am in New York after I've got to the station. It's great to have a depot so big that it takes the place of mountain scenery, but it's hard on the poor traveler, even if it does have all the comforts of away-from-home in it. And then it swallows up things so. It takes away all the pleasure of having a railroad in the town. I suppose five hundred trains come into this station every day, but they're just trains — nothing more. You don't get any fun or information or excitement out of them. You can't even chase them — they bang a gate in your face when you try. I'll bet you don't get as much comfort and fun out of all these five hundred trains, Jim, as we do out of the 4:11 train at Homeburg.

No; it's not any better than your trains.

It's not as good. You can't get raw oysters and magazines and individual cocktails and shaves on it. All you can get is cinders and peanuts, and I would advise you, if you were hungry, to eat the former and put the latter in your eye. It's the kind of a train you New Yorkers would ride on and then write home telling about the horrors of travel in the great West. But it means everything to Homeburg. It means a lot more than the half dozen limited trains which roar through our town fifty miles an hour every day and have made us so expert at dodging that we will develop kangaroo legs in another generation. It's our train. Here in New York a hundred trains come in each morning from Chicago, New Orleans, Everywhere and points beyond, and the office-boy next door to the depot doesn't stop licking stamps long enough to look up. But when old Number Eleven, which is its official railroad name, pulls into Homeburg from

Chicago each afternoon, loaded with mail, news, passengers, home-comers, adventurers, mysterious strangers, friends, brides, heroes, widows and coffins, you can just bet we're there to see her.

It's the town pastime. We all do it. Whenever a Homeburg man has nothing else to do at four o'clock, he steps over to the depot and joins the long line which leans up against the depot wall and keeps it in place during the crisis. Some of them haven't missed a roll-call in years. Old Bill Dorgan, the drayman, has stood on the platform every day since the line was built, rain or shine. Josh James, the colored porter of the Cosmopolitan Hotel, knows more traveling men than William J. Bryan. If he was absent from his post, the engineer wouldn't know where to stop the train. The old men come crawling down on nice days and sun themselves for an hour before the train arrives. The boys sneak slyly down on their way from school

and stand in flocks worshiping the train butcher, who is bigger than the Washington Monument to them. Sometimes a few girls come down too, and hang around, giggling. But that doesn't last long. We won't stand for it in our town. Some missionary tells the girls' parents, and then they suddenly disappear from the ranks and look pouty and insulted for a month, and we know, without being told, that a couple of grown-up young ladies of sixteen or more have been spanked in the good old-fashioned way. Homeburg is a good town, and it makes its girls behave even if it has to half kill them.

You haven't any idea, Jim, how much bustle and noise and excitement and general enthusiasm a passenger train can put into a small town for a few minutes. Just imagine yourself in Homeburg on a cold winter afternoon. It's four o'clock. The sun has stood the climate as long as it can and is getting ready to duck for shelter

behind the dreary fields to the west. If you ran an automobile a mile a minute down the walk on Main Street you wouldn't have to toot for a soul. Now and then a farmer comes out of a store, takes a half hitch on the muffler around his neck, puts on his bearskin gloves and unties his rig. You watch him drive off, the wheels yelling on the hard snow, and wonder if it isn't more cheerful out in the frozen country with the corn shocks for company. It's the terrible half hour of bleak, fading light before the electricity is turned on and the cozy dark comes down — the loneliest hour of the winter's day.

You've stood it about as long as you can, when you notice signs of life across the street. Three men carrying satchels are steering for the depot. Dorgan's dray is rattling down the street. Dorgan's dray would make a cheerful noise if it was the last sound on earth. Little flocks and groups of people begin plodding across the

square. You know them all. Gibb Ogle is going over to watch the baggageman load trunks. It is Gibb's life work. Pelty Amthorne is a little late, but he'll have time to arrange himself against the east end door and answer the roll-call, as he has for thirty years. Miss Ollie Mingle is going over too. She must be expecting that Paynesville young man again. If the competition between her and Ri Hawkes gets any keener, Ollie will have to meet the train down at the crossing and nab the young man there. Sim Atkinson is taking a handful of letters down to the station as usual. Ever since he had his row with Postmaster Flint, he has refused to add to the receipts of the office, and buys his stamps of the mail clerk. It is Sim's hope and dream that sometime the annual receipts of the Homeburg post-office will just miss being enough to bring a raise in salary. Then Sim will bring it to Flint's attention that he would have bought his ten dollars'

worth of stamps that year at home, if Flint hadn't advertised his lock box for rent when he neglected the quarterly dues. Watching Sim thirst for revenge is as much fun as having a real Indian in town.

There's the headlight half a mile down the track! She's coming fast, ten minutes late, and, because you've been lonesome all afternoon and need exercise, you slip into your coat and hustle down. Just as you get to the depot, Number Eleven comes in with a crash and a roar, bell ringing, steam popping off, every brake yelling, platforms loaded, expectation intense, confusion terrific, all nerves a-tingle, and fat old Jack Ball, the conductor, lantern under arm, sweeping majestically by on the bottom step of the smoker. Young Red Nolan and Barney Gastit, two of the station agent's innumerable amateur helpers, race for the baggage car with their truck, making a terrible uproar over the old planks. The mail clerk dumps the sacks. Usually he

gets a stranger in the shin with them. Nothing doing to-day. Just missed a traveling man. We still tell of the time the paper sack scooted across the icy platform and stood Mayor Andrews on his head. He wanted to abolish the whole post-office department.

I've always realized what the city gate must have meant to the medieval loafers, because I've watched Homeburg's city gate at the 4:11 train so often. There's Mrs. Sim Estabrook getting home. Must have been unexpected. No one to meet her. Wonder if Sim's sick again. I'll call up pretty soon. Wimble Horn's been to Chicago again, evidently. Wonder if he'll dump his last eighty acres into the Board of Trade. Who's the fine-looking duck in the fur-lined coat? Not a transient, evidently. He passed Josh by. Must be visiting somebody. Yes; Mrs. Ackley's kissing him. That might mean a scandal in New York, but at home it means rela-

tives. Poor old Jedson Bane's back, I see. Looks pretty bad. Hospital didn't help him. Guess he's not long for us. Hello, Jed, old man! How are you? Better? That's fine. You're looking great! For the love of Mike, will you take a swift look at what's got off? I believe it's from college. They don't wear clothes like that anywhere else. Oh, yes, of course, that's why the Singers' automobile came down. Don't know what we'd do, now that the circus has passed us up, if it wasn't for Sally Singer. She imports a new specimen from the University about every two weeks.

The crowd is off, and you hurl a few good-bys at the travelers getting on. Our two editors check them off as they go. The *Argus* and the *Democrat* get all their news at this train. There's no slipping in and out of town in Homeburg. One and all we face the gantlet. Young Andy Lowes hates to have us beg him not to miss the morning train back, as we do three times a week;

but he simply has to go to Jonesville that often, and we all know why, and he knows we know. The Parsons are rid of their Aunt Mary at last. She's worse than an oyster. Put her in a guest-room and she grows fast to it. They've had her for six months now. Hello! Peter Link's son is going down to Jonesville. Guess he's got his job back. Andy would be a good boy if he would only stop trying to make the distilleries work nights. There goes old Colonel Ackley on his weekly trip. Wonder if he thinks he fools any one with that suit case. Ever since the town went dry, he's had business in the next county. Hello, Colonel! Don't drop that case. You'll break a suit of clothes! Watch him glare.

The engine has gotten its breath by this time. Ever notice how human an engine sounds when it stops after a long run and the air-brake apparatus begins to pant? Old Ball has been fussing for a minute and

now he yells " 'Board." Aunt Emma Newcomb gets in a few more kisses all around her family. She's going down to the next station. The engine gives a few loud puffs, spins its wheels a few times, and the cars begin moving past. Hurrah! Something doing to-day. That grocery salesman who gets here once a week is coming across the square two jumps to a rod. Go it, old man! Go it, train! Ball will always stop for a woman, but the drummers have to take her on the fly. There! He's on — all but his hat. Red Nolan will keep that for him till his next trip.

She's moving fast now. The brakeman hops the next to the last car with grace and carelessness. From every platform devoted friends and relatives are spilling — it is a point of honor in Homeburg to remain with your loved ones in the car as long as you dare before leaping for life. The last car sweeps by. The red and green lights begin to grow smaller with business-

like promptness. There is a parting clatter as the train hits the last switch frog two blocks away. Then it's over. The noise, bustle, confusion, and joyful excitement follow the flying cinders out of town, and silence resumes its reign. I've never heard anything so still as Homeburg after the 4:11 has pulled out.

But we're too busy to notice it as we string across the square to the post-office. We have the day's cargo to digest. We have to wait for the evening mail to be distributed, read the evening newspapers, shake hands with all the returned Homeburgers, size up the brand new Homeburgers and investigate the strangers. And it keeps us busy until supper time.

I've lived in Homeburg thirty-five years and more, and the 4:11 train has been tangled up in my biography all the way. I remember the first time I ever rode on it. The cars were funny-looking coops then, and the engine had a sixty-gallon smoke-

stack. I was four, and I yelled with fear when the train came in and kept it up for the first twenty miles after they lugged me on board. The conductor chucked me under the chin and gave me his punch to play with. He was a young man then. He'd carried my father and mother on their wedding journey, and twenty years after that first ride of mine he carried me and my wife on our wedding journey. The other day we gave our oldest girl two dollars and sent her on her first trip down to Jonesville, by herself. Old Ball was on the train, and he grinned at me and promised to take good care of her. He's pretty gray now, but I hope he stays long enough to start another generation of our family on its travels.

I went to my first circus, to Jonesville, on old Number Eleven. And I went down there at sixteen, a member of the Republican Club, with a torch, and the proudest boy in the State. The next year I started

to college with an algebra and a tennis racket under my arm (they wouldn't jam into the trunk), and a dozen friends came down to see me off. On Number Eleven that day I met four other boys going to the same school. We are still close chums, though one is on the coast, another's here in New York, and the third is in the Philippines.

It was the next year that I noticed a girl as she stepped off of Number Eleven and was met by one of the Homeburg girls. I didn't know who she was, but it seemed to me then as if she must have come from heaven by air-line, and I felt so friendly toward the girl who met her that I had to go down to her house to call that very night. The visitor had come to stay — her father was starting a new store in Homeburg. I'll tell you, when a snorty old train, which assays two pecks of cinders per car, hauls the most wonderful girl on earth into your town and dumps her into

It seemed to me then as if she must have come from heaven by air-line. *Page* 18.

your arms — so to speak, and bunching up events a little — you're bound to love that train.

I could write the history of Homeburg from the 4:11 too. In fact, the train has hauled most of Homeburg into the town. Year after year we watch strangers get off the train and turn around three times, in the way a stranger does when he tries to orient himself and locate the nearest hotel. We get acquainted with those strangers, and in the next week we discover their business and antecedents and politics and preferences in jokes, and whether they pull for the Chicago Cubs or the White Sox. In two weeks they are old-time citizens and go down with us to welcome the newcomers. Henry Broar came to us on the 4:11. I remember he wore a loppy hat and needed a shave that day, and we didn't assess him very highly. But he had a whacking law practice inside of a year, ran for county judge two years later, and now

we swell up to the danger point when people mention Congressman Broar, and let it slip modestly that we are intimate enough with Hank to trade shirts with him.

I remember well the day two imposing strangers got off of Number Eleven, and made the town nearly explode with curiosity by walking out to the Dover farm at the edge of town and pacing it off this way and that. Took us a month to learn their business. That was the time we got the Scraper Works. When Allison B. Unk arrived, he made a tremendous impression by wearing a plug hat still in its first youth, and rolling ponderously around town in a Prince Albert. We've despised Prince Alberts ever since because the town fell for that one and deposited liberally in Unk's new bank, which closed up a year later. And then there was the time when the trainmen put off a scared and sick cripple, who lay in the depot waiting-room with a

ring of sympathetic incompetents around him until Doc Simms could help him. He touched our hearts, and we shelled out enough to send him on a hundred miles to his people. He came back ten years later and kept Homeburg balanced magnificently in the air for a week by showing us how much fun it is to chum with a millionaire. Even sick cripples are likely to guess the market right in this country, you know, and he never forgot us.

As they come in on Number Eleven, so they go. The young men come to Homeburg full of hope, and their sons go on elsewhere loaded with the same. Mothers weep on the station platform many times a year while their Willies and Johns and Petes hike gaily off to chase their fortunes. And many times a year the old boys come back from Chicago. Some of them are rich and proud, and some of them are rich and friendly, and some of them are just friendly. But they all get off of Number Eleven under

our keen, discriminating glare, and they all get the same greeting while we size them up and wonder if their nobby thirty-five dollar suits are their sole stocks-in-trade, and just how much a "lucrative position" means in Chicago.

When the big strike was on, twenty-five years ago, Number Eleven didn't run for two days. We might as well have been marooned on St. Helena. It was awful. When a hand-car came sweeping into town the third day with a big sail on, we hailed it like starving sailors. It was Number Eleven which took on a flat-car loaded with Paynesville's fire department twenty years ago and saved our business section. When President Banks, of the Great F. C. & L. Railroad, rolled into Homeburg in his private car, to become "Pudge" Banks again for a day or two and revisit the scenes of his boyhood, he came on Number Eleven of course. The train hung around while the band played two selections and the

mayor gave an address of welcome. That was her longest visit in Homeburg.

The old train even bursts into local politics and social affairs now and then. It managed to jump the track in the campaign of '96, leaving four distinguished Democratic speakers, fizzing with oratory, in the cornfields, and ruining the only rally the Dems attempted to pull off. And it took DeLancey Payley down after all the rest of the town had failed, in a manner which kept us tearful with delight for a week. DeLancey was sequestered in an Eastern college by his loving parents, and when he was graduated he came home and started an exclusive circle composed mostly of himself. He was unapproachably haughty, until one day he accompanied a proud beauty, who was visiting the Singers (our other hothouse family) to Number Eleven, and lingered too long after the train started. DeLancey got off, but in doing so he performed a variety of diffi-

cult and instructive feats of balancing on his ear which were viewed by a large audience with terrific enthusiasm. When DeLancey was haughty after that, we always praised this feat, and you'd be surprised to see how soon he got his nose down out of the zenith.

Every day old Number Eleven brings in its mail-bag full of hopes and triumphs, of good news, bad news, and tragedy. Every day it brings the new ideas from the world outside and the latest wrinkles in hanging on to this whirling old sphere in a pleasant and successful manner. We get our styles from the Chicago men who step off of its platforms and tarry with us. We send our brides off on it with an entire change of bill at each performance. We get our peeps into wonderland and romance and comedy from the theatrical troupes which straggle out of its cars and rush to the baggage car to make sure that no varlet has attached their trunks since the last

stop. It is the magic carpet which carries our youth forth into the great world to wonder and learn and prevail. And now and then it is the kindly beast of burden who brings back some old playmate, done with weariness and striving, and coming home to rest in our cemetery beyond the south hill.

No, Jim, your thousand trains a day, with their parlor cars, bathrooms, barber shops and libraries, are all right, but they're just trains. Number Eleven is a whole lot more than a train. It is the world come to visit us once a day — a moving picture of life which we enjoyed long before Edison took out his patent. Do you wonder that it makes me sad to see so many perfectly good trains going to waste in this roofed-over township of yours? Take me out of it, please.

II

THE FRIENDLY FIRE-FIEND

The Joys of Fighting Him with a Volunteer Fire Department

HELLO! Here comes the fire department! Watch the people swarm! Uumpp! Ouch! Excuse me for living. This is no place for a peaceable spectator. I'm going to cast anchor in this doorway until the mob gets past.

No, thank you. I'll not join the Marathon. But you don't know how homesick and happy it makes me to see this crowd run! I've been in New York a week now, and honestly this is almost the first really human impulse I've seen a citizen give way to. Until this minute I've felt as if

I were a hundred thousand miles from Homeburg, with all train service suspended for the winter. If I could find the man who stepped on my heels while chasing that engine, I'd thank him and ask him what volunteer fire department he used to run with. See 'em scramble.

Whoop! Here comes the hook-and-ladder truck! This is nothing but Homeburg on a big scale. I'm beginning to envy you city chaps now. That makes the fourth engine that's come past. You get more for your money than we do. Look at that chief hurdling curbstones in his little red wagon. If Homeburg ever gets big enough to have a chief's wagon, I'll suffocate with pride.

I see it's the same old story. Fire's all out. It always is by the time you've run nine blocks. Watch the racers coming back. Stung, every one of them — goldbricked. There's a fat fellow who's run half a mile, I'll bet. If his tongue hung

out any farther, he'd trip up on it. But he'll do it again next time. They all do. Learning to stop running to fires is as hard as learning to stop buying mining-stock in the West. And it's just as big a swindle too. The returns from running to fires are marvelously small. They tell me that a hundred million dollars a year goes up in flames in this country. I don't believe it. If it does, I want to know who gets to see all the fun. I don't.

I've run to fires all my life, until lately, and I've drawn about three hundred and seventy-five blanks. Once I almost saw a big grain-elevator burn in a Western town. That is, I would have seen it, if I had looked out of my hotel window. But I'd run two miles to see a burning haystack in the afternoon, and I was so dead tired that I slept right through the performance that night. And once I did see a row of stores burn, back in Homeburg — at the distance of a mile. I was

in school, and the teacher wouldn't dismiss us. By stretching my neck several feet I could just see the flames leaping over the trees, but that was all. Some of the bad boys sneaked out of the door, but I was a good boy, and waited one thousand years until school was out and the fire was ditto. I've never felt quite the same since toward either goodness or education.

Some men run faithfully to fires year after year and view a fine collection of burning beefsteaks and feverish chimneys and volcanic wood-sheds, while others stroll out after dinner in a strange city and spend a pleasant evening watching a burning oil-refinery make a Vesuvius look pale and sickly in comparison. Luck is distributed in a dastardly way, and as for myself I've quit trying. I don't run to fires at all any more. The big cities have fooled me long enough by sending out forty pieces of apparatus to smother a defective flue. I

stay behind and watch the crowd. It's more amusing and not half so much work.

Of course in Homeburg it's different. You city people don't realize what a blessing the fire-fiend is to a small town. Fires mean a whole lot to us. They keep us from petrifying altogether during the dull seasons. And they don't have to be real fires, either. Any old alarm will do. Our fire-bell sounds just as terrible for a little brush fire as it would for a flaming powder-mill. It's an adventure merely to hear the thing. Take a winter night in the dull season after Christmas, for instance. You have begun to go to sleep right after supper. You've finished the job at nine o'clock, and by two A. M. you're sailing placidly southwest of Australia in a seagoing automobile.

Suddenly the pirate-ship in the rear, which you hadn't noticed before, slips up and begins potting away at you with a dull metallic boom. The auto slips its clutch,

and the engine begins to clang and clatter, and somebody off behind a red-hot mountain in the distance begins ringing an enormous bell just as you slide downward into a crater of flame — and then you wake up entirely, and the fire-bell is going "clang-clang-clang-clang-clang," while below you hear the ringing crunch of your neighbor's feet on the cold snow, and outside the north window there is a red glare which may be either the end of the world or another exploded lamp in 'Bige Brinton's chicken-incubator; you won't know which until you have stabbed both feet into one pants-leg, crawled all over the cold floor for a missing sock, and run half a mile, double-reefing your nightshirt to keep it from trailing out from under your overcoat. That's what a fire-alarm means in Homeburg.

It's just as interesting in the daytime too. Imagine a summer afternoon in Homeburg about three o'clock. It's hotter

than a simoon in the Sahara, and the aggregate business being done along Front Street is nineteen cents an hour. The nearest approach to life on the street is Sam McAtaw sitting in a shady spot on the edge of the sidewalk and leaning against a telephone-pole, sound asleep. You're sitting in your office chair, with your feet on the desk, dozing, when suddenly you hear footsteps outside. Whoever is making them is turning them out with great rapidity, and that in itself is novel enough to be interesting. The footsteps go by, and you look at their maker. It is Gibb Ogle surging up the walk and yanking his ponderous feet this way and that with tremendous energy. Nothing but a fire or a loose lion can make Gibb run, and you don't take any stock in the lion theory; so you tumble out after him.

By this time Sim Bone is on the street, and Harvey McMuggins is coming up behind, while half a dozen heads have sud-

denly sprouted from as many doorways. Your heart beats with suspense when Gibb comes to the town-hall corner. Hurrah! He's steering for the fire-house. You're overhauling him rapidly, and by a big sprint you beat out Clatt Sanderson, and grab one handle of the fire-bell ropes. Gibb grabs the other, and then you let her have it for all there is in you.

Did I say anything about Homeburg being asleep? Forget it. Before you've hit the bell a dozen taps you can't hear it for the tramp of feet. Every store in town is belching forth proprietors and clerks. They are coming bareheaded and coatless; some of them are collarless. Chief Dobbs, who shoes horses in his less glorious moments and keeps his helmet hanging on the forge-cover, dashes into the engine-room, grabs his trumpet, and begins firing orders, not singly, but in broadsides. There's nobody there to order yet, but he's just getting his hand in, and ten seconds

later, when the first member of the company arrives, he is saluted with nineteen stentorian commands in one blast. Half a minute later the engine-house is clogged with fire-fighters, and the air is a maelstrom of orders, counter orders, suggestions, objections, and hoarse yells. Then a roar of wheels sounds outside, and you drop the bell-rope handle and go out to see the finest sight of all.

I suppose those old Romans thought the chariot-races were pretty nifty, but if an old Roman should reassemble himself and watch the dray-race to a Homeburg fire, he'd wonder how he ever managed to sit through a silly little dash around an arena. From the south comes a cloud of dust and a terrific racket. At an equal distance from the east comes another cloud of dust and an even more terrible uproar, Clay Billings's dray having more loose spokes than Bill Dorgan's. The clouds approach with tremendous speed. Bill is

a little ahead. He is lashing his horses with the ends of the reins, while from the bounding dray small articles of no value, such as butter-firkins and cases of eggs, are emerging and following on the road behind.

But Clay isn't beaten — not by a thousand miles. He's going to make it a dead heat or better — no, Bill hit the crossing first. By George! That Clay boy is a wonder. He deliberately pulled in and shot across behind Bill, cutting off a good fifty feet. His team stops, sliding on their haunches, and ten seconds later is being hitched to the hose-cart, while Clay is on the seat clanging the foot-bell triumphantly. It's the fiftieth race, or thereabouts, between the two, and the score is about even. The winner gets two dollars for the use of his team. I've seen horse-races for a thousand-dollar purse which weren't half as exciting.

In the meanwhile more messengers have arrived from the fire. It is in the Mahlon

Brown barn, and late advices indicate terrible progress. As fast as forty-nine rival fingers can do it, the tugs are fastened, and the cart is off down the street with a long trail of citizens after it.

Bill's team, badly blown, is hitched to the hook-and-ladder truck, and willing hands push it out through the door. There is always more or less of a feud between the hook-and-ladder boys and the hose-cart boys, because the former get the second team and rarely arrive at the fire in time to hoist the beautiful blue ladders before the hose-cart gang puts the conflagration out. Indeed, the feeling has gotten so strong at times that the hook-and-ladder gang has threatened to double the prize-money by private subscription and get their rig out first, but patriotism has thus far prevented this.

You have rung the bell until you are tired, by this time, and, besides, the human flood has rushed on, leaving no one to

whom you can explain just how you thought you smelled fire and beat the world to the engine-house. So you set out for the fire yourself and jog over the half-mile in pretty fair time, considering the heat. It is an impressive sight — not the fire itself, but the event. Two thousand, two hundred and nine people are there — that being the population of Homeburg minus the sick and wandering.

In the midst of the seething mass are the hose-cart and the ladder-truck. Around them dozens of red helmets are bobbing, while the quivering air is cut and slashed and mangled with a very hurricane of orders: "Bring up that hose — " "Whoa, keep that horse still — " "Bring her round this way — " "Bring her round *this* way — " "Hey, you chumps, the fire's *this* side — " "Back up that wagon — " "Come ahead with the wagon — " "Get out of here till we get a ladder up — " "Axes here — " "Turn on that water —" "Turn on that

water — " " *Turn on that water!!* — " " Jones, go down and tell that wooden Indian to turn on that water." " Hold that water, you — " " *Hold that water!* " " Turn her on, I say." " Turn her — " " Wow — turn that nozzle the other way — "

And then the water comes with a mighty rush, yanking the nozzlemen this way and that and sweeping firemen and common citizens aside as if they were mere straws.

As a rule, this is the climax, and the end comes rapidly. By this time Brown, who had put the fire out with a few pails of water before the alarm sounded, has persuaded the department to call off its hose, the barn being full of valuable hay. So there isn't anything to do. The water is turned off. Gibb Ogle explains to the one hundred and eleventh knot of people how he was going past the place when he saw the tongue of flame, and every one disperses after a pleasant social time.

Everybody is tolerably well satisfied ex-

cept the hook-and-ladder gang, which, as usual, is skunked again — never got a ladder out. A couple of the axmen had a little fun with a rear window, but otherwise the affair is a flat failure. They go back sullenly, but are comforted when the roll is called, when each member who was present draws a dollar from the city treasury. As usual, Pete Sundbloom is late, and tries to edge in to roll-call, though he was a mile away from peril, but he can't make it stick and gets the hoarse hoot when his little game is discovered.

I want to ask you — isn't that a pleasant interruption on a dead day? It makes life worth living, and I really wonder that there isn't more incendiarism in small towns throughout the United States.

Of course all the alarms aren't fizzles. Sometimes we have a real fire, and then the scene defies description. When a fair-sized house burns down, Chief Dobbs is so hoarse that he can't talk for a week, and

when the row of wooden stores on the south side went up in flames a few years ago, the old chief, Patrick McQuinn, burst a blood-vessel and had to retire, the doctor having warned him that he must never use a speaking-trumpet again.

I was away at the time, but they tell me that was a grand fire for the hook-and-ladder boys. They were right in the middle of it, and every ladder in the truck was out. There was some trouble over the fact that the big extension ladder was too tall for the buildings, and when Art Simms had climbed to the top, he managed to fall fifteen feet to the roof of the furniture-store, bruising himself badly. But, on the whole, great good was done, and the second story workers were kings that day. When the hotel caught, and the hook-and-ladder gang got into it, the way the upper windows belched mattresses, mirrors, toilet-sets, pictures and beds was unbelievable. Almost everything in the building was saved, and

some of it was successfully repaired afterward.

The axmen had their innings that day, too. It was a great sight to see Andy Lowes leap nimbly up the ladder and poke in window after window with his spiked ax, stepping backward now and then into nozzleman Jones's face in order to view the effect. The axmen got glory enough to last for years, and it was an axman who put out the last scrap of fire. Frank Sundell was the hero. He was sitting on the ridge-pole of Emerson's restaurant when he noticed a few blazing spots on the shingle roof beneath him. He might have called the hose department; but, as I have said, there is a good deal of rivalry between the two, and, besides, Sundell had had a slow time that day, Lowes doing most of the display work. So Frank reached cautiously down with his trusty ax, cut out a blazing section of shingles, and tossed it to the ground. The crowd cheered, and he

was so encouraged that he cut out the rest of the hot spots and put out the fire single-handed. Sundell is one of our very best firemen and stands in line for a nozzleman's position some day.

Of course a small-town fire department doesn't get as much practice in twisting the fire-fiend's tail as a city fire company; but our boys have a mighty good record, and we're proud of them. Since we've had water-works, and the department hasn't had to depend on some cistern which always went dry just at a critical moment, there hasn't been a conflagration in Homeburg big enough to get into the city papers. The boys may be a little overzealous now and then, but they are always on the job ten minutes after the first tap of the bell, and the way they go after a red tongue of flame on a kitchen roof reminds me of a terrier shaking a rat. They are our real heroes, — the fire-laddies, — for outside of Frank Ericson and Shorty McGrew, who

work on the switching-crew, and come sailing down through town hanging gracefully from the end of a box-car ladder by one foot and hand, no one else has any chance to face danger in Homeburg.

Of course our firemen don't face danger regularly, between meals, like your big paid departments here, and about the most the ordinary business man gets in the danger-line is the imminent peril of getting a new twenty-five-dollar suit in line with the chemical hose; but we don't forget in Homeburg how old Mrs. Agnew's house burned twenty years ago this spring and the department was late, owing to the magnificent depth of Exchange Street, the roads having broken up, and how, when it got there, the house was a mass of flames, with the poor old lady, who had been bedridden for years, shrieking inside, and a hundred neighbors shrieking on the outside; and how Pat McQuinn and Henry Aultmeyer dove in through a window, with

wet coats around their heads and the chemical-hose playing on their backs; and how they tugged and hauled at Mrs. Agnew, who weighed two hundred and fifty pounds, and couldn't get a grip on her, and finally upended the burning bed and dumped her out of the window, breaking her hip, and then dumped themselves out and rolled in the wet grass until their hair and mustaches and clothes quit blazing — after which they retired into cotton-wool for a month.

Maybe your men would have done it more scientifically and entirely saved poor Mrs. Agnew, who died the next month of the broken hip, but they couldn't have stuck to the job any more heroically; and when Homeburg citizens talk about "brave fire-laddies" and "homely heroes" at the annual benefit supper of the Volunteer Company No. 1, they mean Pat and Henry, and are perfectly willing to argue the question with any one.

So we worship our company to our heart's content, and when it comes pacing slowly down the street at the head of every parade, with the members looking handsomer than chorus girls in their dark-blue flannel suits, red belts, and neat blue caps, we look at them full of pride and confidence. Our little boys dream of the time when they will grow up and join the company and wear seven-pound red helmets at fires, and come home tired and muddy in the gray dawn after a fire and demand hot coffee from their admiring women-folks; and as for the Homeburg girls — well, the greatest social function of our town, or of the county for that matter, is the annual ball of the Homeburg fire department.

And let me tell you, when the nine-piece orchestra — all home talent — strikes up the grand march and Chief Dobbs, with his wide-gauge mustache and vacuum-cleaned uniform, leads the company around

the hall, every hero with the girl or wife of his heart on his arm and a full hundred couples of the mere laymen crowding in behind, in a long and many-looped line, the Astor ball would have to do business with a brass band and a display of fireworks to attract any more enthusiasm.

That's what the fire department means to us in Homeburg. We don't suffer half so much from fires as we would from the lack of them; and when this new concrete construction makes the world fire-proof, and the Homeburg fire department rusts away and disappears, we will mourn it even more sincerely than we did the opera house with a real gallery, which got overheated one night twenty-five years ago and burned, compelling us to get along with a mere hall with a flat floor ever afterward.

III

HOMEBURG'S TWO FOUR-HUNDREDTHS

The Struggles of our Best Families to Impress Us

HOLD on, Jim. Don't hurry so. Remember I don't have a chance to walk up Fifth Avenue every day. Give me a chance to astonish myself. Here are ten thousand women going by in clothes that would make a lily turn red and burn up with shame, and an equal number of proud gents with curlycue collars on their overcoats, and I want to do the sight justice.

You see all this parade every day, but I don't, and I want to drink it all in. See that feminine explosion in salmon plush!

That would paralyze business back home. Watch that hat crossing the street — it ought to be arrested for being without visible means of support — Oh, I see! There's a girl under it with one of those rifle-barrel skirts. Gee! Ssh, Jim! Did you see the lady who just passed? Let's beg her pardon for intruding on this earth. Say, you could peel enough haughtiness off of her to supply eight duchesses and still have enough for the lady cashier at my hotel. I'll bet she is one of your Four Hundred. For goodness' sake, Jim, if we pass any of your social lighthouses, point them out to me. I'm here to see the sights.

I know the rest of the country throws it up to New York a lot because of its Four Hundred, and that the ordinary small-town man gets so scornful when he talks of the idle and diamond-crusted rich, with their poodle-dog pastimes, that he lives in constant danger of stabbing his eyes with his nose. But I'm not that way; I'm

interested. Nothing fascinates me so much as the stories in your papers about Mrs. Clymorr Busst's clever pearl earrings, made to resemble door knobs; and about Mrs. Spenser Coyne's determination to have Columbia University removed because it interferes with the view from her garage; and about little Mrs. Justin Wright's charming innocence in buying a whole steamship whenever she goes over to Europe. I'd go a long way to see your Four Hundred perform; and moreover, after I had accumulated a precarious balance on an iron spike fence in order to rest one eye on a genuine duke while he fought his way out of a church with one of your leading local beauties, who had just been affixed to him for life, I would not squint pityingly on the heaving mass of spectators and hiss:

"We don't do this in Homeburg."

Because we would do it fast enough if we had a chance.

We don't have anything like your Smart Set, of course, but I desire to say with pride that while there aren't enough tiaras in Homeburg to fill a pill box, and the only limousine we possess is the closed carriage which is used for the family of the deceased at funerals, we have our exclusive and magnificent class just as New York has. We haven't a Four Hundred in Homeburg, but we have a Two Four-Hundredths. If you get as much real, solid pleasure and amusement in New York watching your Four Hundred as we do watching the Payleys and the Singers, I envy you. They're worth all the trouble they cause.

For a good many years, Mrs. Wert Payley, wife of the First National Bank, was our Smart Set, all by herself. There was never any question of it. She admitted it, and we didn't take the trouble to deny it. In a way, she was regarded as a public benefactor. Nobody else cared to

spend the money necessary to be a Smart Set, and since Mrs. Payley was willing to fight and be bled, so to speak, to give our town tone and inject a little excitement into our prairie lives now and then, we felt that the least we could do was to regard her as a social colossus.

The Payleys were the only people in Homeburg who had lunch at noon, and as early as 1900 they ate it from the bare table. She was the only woman in Homeburg who could " look in " on an afternoon gabble of any kind for a few minutes and get away with it without insulting the hostess. When she shook hands with you, you always grabbed in the wrong place, no matter how much thought you put into it, and while you were readjusting your sights and clawing for her fingers and perspiring with mortification, she was getting a start on you which kept you bashfully humble as long as she was in sight. She was real goods, Mrs. Payley was — not

arrogant, but just naturally superior. People who called at the Payleys' evenings were the social lights of Homeburg, and whenever some lady wanted to discharge a few fireworks indicating her social position, she would form a hollow square around Mrs. Payley in public and get intimate with her in full view of everybody. Mrs. Payley ran the town, and everybody was comfortable and content about it until the Singers arrived.

The Singers came from Cincinnati to cashier in the Farmers' State Bank: Mrs. Singer was city bred and city heeled and when she met Mrs. Wert Payley she didn't even blink. She put out her hand a little nor'-nor'east of her chatelaine watch, when Mrs. Payley put out her hand some four inches southwest by south, and waited calmly for Mrs. Payley to correct herself. There was an awful moment of suspense, and when it became evident that the only way to get Mrs. Singer's hand down to

the other level would be to excavate beneath her and change her foundations, Mrs. Payley gave in and reached.

War was declared that minute, and I shudder now when I think of the months which followed.

Mrs. Payley, having been on the ground a long time, had fortified it, of course, and was president of all the clubs. But inside of a month Mrs. Singer flanked her position. She declined to join most of the clubs on the plea of being a busy woman, and organized a flower mission. Its object was to distribute flowers to the sick and needy, who generally consisted of Pat Ryan. Pat was nearly smothered in flowers that year, being good-natured, and as the work of collecting said flowers involved a great deal of meeting in the Singer home and dancing in the Singer attic, which was floored with hard maple that winter, Mrs. Singer had the girls of the town organized into a Roman phalanx before spring.

Mrs. Payley was triumphantly reëlected to the presidency of all her clubs that winter, but Mrs. Singer organized a public library association and pulled off a German. Mrs. Payley attended, and when she tried to patronize Mrs. Singer with her compliments, that clever infighter beat her to it by explaining the theory of the German to her. That made Mrs. Payley so mad that the next month she invited the state president of the Federation of Women's Clubs to visit her, and didn't ask Mrs. Singer to the tea. The next week Mrs. Singer organized a Country Club. It only consisted of a two-room pavilion in which picnics could be held and dances could be pulled off, with long intermissions for the extraction of slivers from the feet. But it was just as easy to talk about while you were in town and to refer to in a hushed and exclusive manner as if it cost a million, and when Mrs. Payley realized that she could never hope to become exclusive

enough to get into it, though goodness knows she couldn't have been hired to belong to the foolish thing, she quit speaking to Mrs. Singer, the split became a chasm, and we began choosing up sides in earnest.

That winter Mrs. Singer seceded from the church which Mrs. Payley ran, and founded an Episcopal church, taking seven choir members out of the Congregational church, to say nothing of the organist. All this mixed up religion in Homeburg that winter until you could scarcely tell it from a ward caucus.

By spring it was dangerous to show favors to either side, and when the school election came around, it was fought out between the Payley and Singer factions. Sally Singer had been given higher marks than Sarah Payley, and the upshot of it all was that when the Payley side prevailed at election by nine votes, the superintendent lost his job. He was a good

superintendent and the cause of education didn't get over the jolt for some years, but justice, of course, had to be done.

The Singers got some satisfaction out of it by electing the school board treasurer, which took a lot of money out of the First National Bank. That, of course, got the banks into the row. You city folks may have your financial flurries, but if you've never been around and between and under a bank scrap in a small town, you don't know what trouble is. There were a couple of failures that needn't have happened, and a lot of partisan financiering, and then the town rose up and sat down on our social leaders with a most pronounced scrunch. We can stand just about so much society in Homeburg, but when it gets to elbowing into business, churches, schools and funerals, we are more sensible than you metropolitans are. It only takes a half-day to pass the word through a small town, and one fine morning the

Payleys and Singers discovered that while they were still facing each other like two snorty and inextinguishable generals, their armies had gone off arm in arm.

That ended the feud and put society in Homeburg back in its proper place — in the front parlors in the evening after the dishes had been done up. The Payleys and Singers still continued to compete, but we declined to fight and bleed for them and amused ourselves instead by watching them from the sidelines. Mrs. Payley joined the "When I was in Europe" brigade, and the Singers got the first automobile in town. It kept the Singers so busy supporting and encouraging it, that the Payleys were able to build the first modern house with a sleeping porch and individual bathrooms — and about the time the Singers came back with a two-story bungalow full of chopped wood furniture, Mrs. Payley went abroad again and began to say: "The last time I was in Europe." It was

nip and tuck, year in and year out, between the two, and we all enjoyed it a lot.

But it wasn't until the Payley and Singer children came home from college and formed a tight little circle with their backs out, that we began to reap the benefits of really haughty society.

The Payley and Singer children had absorbed all their families had to offer, and then they went off to school in the East and laid in a complete stock of the latest styles in superiority. They were all finished in the same spring and shipped back to Homeburg — magnificent specimens of college art with even their names done over — and when they realized that they had to live forever in the old town, where no one spoke their language or could even understand their clothes, the family feud was forgotten and the four rushed together for mutual protection and formed a real Smart Set.

It's just like your bigger crowd. It

doesn't have anything to do with us in particular. And we are just like you are. You open your Sunday papers and read reams about the plumbing and pajamas and pet dogs and love affairs of your first families, and I guess nothing that Sally Singer or Sarah Payley ever did got past the scornful but lynx-eyed Homeburgers. When Sarah was getting letters on expensive stationery from Kansas City, the whole town discussed the probable character of a man who would put blue sealing wax on his envelopes, and when Sally made her pa put an addition on the Singer home, we knew what color she was going to do her boudoir in three months in advance. But we are prouder than your people. You hire down-trodden reporters to go and abase themselves to get the information, while we wouldn't lower ourselves enough to ask even by proxy. We just let the sewing women and hired girls tell us.

Being an exclusive set in a small town is a whole lot harder than it is in New York, and I've always admired our youngsters for the way they've carried it off. Of course, four people can't form a club or give parties or support an exclusive restaurant; they can't even be exclusive all by themselves. They have had to mingle with us, but they are always carefully insulated. They joined our Country Club, but they did it with their fingers crossed, so to speak. They always come out together and protect each other from our rude advances as much as possible. They import college friends whenever they can, and they always have a few bush leaguers, or utility players, to work in on such occasions. Henry Snyder used to say he could tell when there was need of the peasantry at the Singer house by the way Sally Singer would suddenly descend from the third cross-road beyond Mars to the street in front of the post-office and

ask him with an accurately hospitable smile if he couldn't bring his sister up to the house that evening to meet a few guests. And once a year all four turn in and give a real dress rehearsal of up-to-date social science, to which Homeburg is liberally invited and at which unknown and unsuspected things are served for refreshments and a new and deadly variation of bridge or dancing or punch or receiving lines or conversational technique is put on for our inspection and bewilderment.

We have a show at our opera-house now and then, and we always go to these affairs largely to see our Smart Set perform. It always comes — even East Lynne is better that West Homeburg — and I'll tell you, by the time they have come rustling in about half way through the first act, H. DeLancey Payley and W. Sam Singer in clawhammers with an acre apiece of white shirt and holding about four bushels of pink fluff over their arms, and the boys

have consulted anxiously with the usher, the two girls, beautiful visions of Arctic perfection, standing in well-bred suspense and holding their gowns in the 1915 manner, and all four have hurried down to the best seats and have unharnessed and stowed away their upholsterings, and DeLancey has folded up his explosive hat and Sam has leaned back in a lordly way and beckoned to the usher for another program — by the time all this has transpired, the actors have forgotten their lines, and we have gotten our money's worth out of the evening's entertainment.

The hardships those people inflict on themselves in the sacred cause of correctness are agonizing. It takes something more than nerve to wear a silk hat and Prince Albert down to the Homeburg post-office on Sundays to get the mail — especially with Ad Summers always on hand to spill a large red laugh into his sleeve and say to some friend in a tremendous stage

whisper that the darn dude's legs must be bowed or he wouldn't want to hide 'em that way. And as for the carriage proposition, I'm certain that no martyrs have endured more. DeLancey persuaded Hi Nott to buy a real city carriage, and the four have used it faithfully; only the Payleys and Singers live in different edges of town, and by the time Hi has hauled Sam and his sister across town to the Payleys, through Homeburg's April streets, which average a little more depth than width, and has hauled the four down to the theater, there are usually about three breakdowns. I've seen the four of them plodding haughtily home from "Wedded but No Wife", the girls holding their imported dresses out of the mud, and the boys sounding for bottom on the crossings with their canes, while Hi drove the carriage solemnly down the road beside them. The mud was too deep for them to get home in the carriage, but everybody could see it was there and that

they had paid for it and had done their darndest, anyway. After all, that's no worse than the way you New Yorkers carry your gloves in your hand in warm weather. You don't need them, but you want the world to know you've got 'em and wouldn't be found dead without 'em.

When our Smart Set gives a party, we all try to live up to it as far as possible, and so we insist on going by carriage. Hi starts hauling us at six o'clock, six to a load in dry weather, and he usually gets the last batch there just in time to begin hauling the first platoon home.

But those are just little troubles for our Smart Set. Your Smart Set has no troubles except the job of spending its money fast enough to keep from being smothered by the month's income. It does what it pleases, and if anybody objects, it raises the price of something or other by way of retort. But our Smart Set has to live in Homeburg, and what is more, it has to live

off of Homeburg, which is as hoity-toity a place to live off of as you can find. Sally Singer can't afford to offend any one but the depositors in the Payley Bank, and if DeLancey caused any Homeburger to stalk down to his father's bank and extract a thousand-dollar savings deposit, old man Payley would thrash DeLancey and set him to work on his farm. They have to show their superiority over us so deftly and pleasantly that we don't mind it. They have to keep us good-natured while despising us. With half the genius for contemptuous conciliation that the Payley and Singer children have displayed in the last five years, the French nobility could have kept the peasantry yelling for bread as a privilege long after 1793.

Emma Madigan weighs two hundred pounds and drives a milk route. She went to high school with Sally Singer, and it is the joy of her life to poke her head into the Singer home when Sally has company and

yell: "Sall, here's your milk!" But Sally never tries to refrigerate her with the Spitzbergen glare which she uses on us collectively when she goes to the theater. You couldn't possibly refrigerate Emma, but you might encourage her to say more — like the time when Sarah Payley passed her on the street without speaking, being busy treading the upper altitudes with a young Princeton College visitor, and Em yelled back: "For goodness' sakes, Sarey, if you didn't lace so tight you could get your chin down and see some one!"

But most of us are not so frank. We are too good-natured. As a matter of fact, we'd hate to see the Payleys and Singers common. They help to make Homeburg interesting, and so long as they know their place and don't irritate us, we wouldn't hurt their feelings for the world — that is, not much.

There was a dancing school in Homeburg two winters ago, and to the con-

sternation of every one the Payley and Singer young folks joined it. It took two meetings for us to discover what had clogged up the atmosphere and taken the prance out of things. Then we tumbled. The Payleys and Singers were educating us. They were fitting us to live in the rarified upper altitudes of refinement and to mingle with rank without stepping all over its feet. By the third meeting Henry Snyder had caught on to most of the signals and he explained them to a lot of us beforehand with care. When Sally Singer dropped on to a bench and moved her skirt ever so slightly aside it was a sign that the young man with whom she was speaking might sit down and hold sweet converse. And when Sarah Payley smiled brightly at a gentleman from some distance and just caressed the chair beside her with her eye for the millionth part of a second, that young man, if he had a spark of gentility in him, would hurdle the intervening chairs

to arrive. We also discovered how to get away just before the young ladies got bored, by other delicate signs, and how to derive the fact that they were thirsty and needed sustenance, and just how to imprison them in our strong but respectful arms during a waltz, and how to collect fans and gloves and programs and handkerchiefs from the floor without grunting or jolting the conversation. It was hard work, and spoiled the evening to a certain extent, but we did the best we could until Jim Reebe spoiled it all in the fourth lesson. Miss Singer had collected her usual six men during the intermission with as many bright glances, and was being admired properly and according to Hoyle, when Jim up and remarks, in his megaphone bass: "Say, Sall, you're a great work of art, but the time you made a hit with me was the day you slid down the banisters at school."

That finished the course; and the Smart

Set, being unanimously absent the rest of the winter, we gave ourselves up to vulgar pleasure, stuffed our white gloves back into the bureaus and yelled for encores when we couldn't get them any other way.

I'll tell you, a man could be a hero to his valet with half the exertion which it takes to be a Somebody to an old grammar-school mate in a small town.

Our Smart Set is disintegrating now, and things look blue for social progress in Homeburg. Sally Singer is getting ready to be married this summer to a Pittsburgh man who wears a cane. The remaining three look like the old guard at Waterloo closing in under a heavy fire. Looks to me as if there were going to be some of these mess alliances to wind up with, for Sam Singer is calling on Mabel Andrews in citizen's clothing, she having jeered him out of his Prince Albert; and Henry Snyder has stopped scoffing and infests the Payley house to an alarming extent. So I

imagine that our Smart Set will get back to shirtsleeves in two generations less than yours usually requires, and we'll miss it a lot. Next to the ill feeling between the *Argus* and the *Democrat*, it has been our greatest diversion.

IV

THE SERVANT QUESTION IN HOMEBURG

How Mrs. Singer Amuses Us All by Insisting on Having It

NO apologies, Jim. If the Declaration of Independence who prepares your meals for you has packed up and gone, I don't need any explanations. I understand already. You can't ask me up to dinner because there isn't going to be any dinner. If you don't go out to a restaurant, you'll get a bite yourself while Mrs. Jim puts the children to bed. And then you'll spend the evening wondering where you can beg, borrow, abduct, hypnotize, or manufacture another cook.

I know all about it. The great sorrow

has come upon you, and there's only one comfort — there are others. It falls upon all who try to get out of doing their own housework in New York. And I'll bet you were good enough to the last cook, too — only asked her for one night out a week, came to her meals promptly, didn't demand more than a fair living wage, and let her have the rest. Yes, of course you did. And you're going to let the next one have the best room and ring for her breakfast in the morning, aren't you? What? Draw the line at that? Well, Jim, I admire your nerve. You're one of the grand old rugged patriots who will not be trodden on. Why did your last cook leave, anyway?

Didn't like the kitchen, eh? And being in a flat you couldn't tear it out and rebuild it. Yes, I agree with you. The servant problem in New York is getting to be very serious. To-day you are gay and happy with luxury and comfort all about

you, and to-morrow you are picking sardines out of a can with a fork for dinner. I am certainly glad I live in the country, where servant girls do not come on Monday with two trunks and go away early Thursday morning with three trunks and a bundle.

We have no servant problem in Homeburg. However, I exclude Mrs. Singer from this "we." There are only two servants in the whole town. Mrs. Singer has them. That is, she tries to have them. Mrs. Singer's attempt to have servants in a town which is full of hired girls is one of the things which make life worth living and talking about in Homeburg.

How do I know about it? Bless you, we all know about it. It's a public tragedy. Can't help ourselves. We've had four of Mrs. Singer's ex-servants in our house in six years, and they have all told their troubles. Mrs. Singer trains girls for the entire town. She's twice as good as a

domestic science school, and she doesn't charge any tuition. She is devoting her life to the training up of perfect hired girls, and we revel in the results. It is ungrateful of us to blame her for taking away our hired girls, because, as a matter of fact, she is our greatest blessing. Right at this minute in Homeburg I know that two eager families are sitting around waiting for the latest Singer class in domestic science to graduate and come back to them for jobs. It ought to come most any time. The course rarely lasts over three months.

You see, Mrs. Singer isn't one of us. She came to Homeburg from a large city, and she brought her ideas with her. She's not the kind of a woman, either, who is going to cut those ideas down to fit Homeburg. Her plan is to change Homeburg over to fit her ideas. She's been working at it for fifteen years now, and I must say she's won out in several cases. Dress suits are now worn quite unblushingly, we have

a country club half a mile from the post-office — that's the advantage of a small town, you can get away from the rush and bustle of the city into the sweet cool country in about four jumps — and no one thinks of serving a party dinner without salad any more. But she's fallen down on one thing. She can't keep servants. That problem has been too much for her. Mrs. Payley, her rival, has had the same hired girl for sixteen years or more; but Mrs. Singer scorns a hired girl. She must have servants, two of them, and while she has a remarkable constitution and has stood up for years under the fight, I don't see how she can keep it up much longer.

A hired girl in Homeburg is a very reasonable creature. We never have any trouble with them, and they have very little with us. We usually catch them green and wild, just off the steamer, and they come to us equipped with a thorough working knowledge of the Swedish lan-

guage, and nothing else to speak of. Our wives take them in and teach them how to boil water, make beds, handle a broom, use clothespins, and all the simpler tricks of housework, to say nothing of an elementary knowledge of English, which they usually acquire in a month; and we pay this kind a couple of dollars a week, and they wash the clothes, take care of the furnace, and mow the lawn with great pleasure. They usually stay a year or so and then they go to Mrs. Singer's finishing school. They do not go because they are discontented, but because she offers them five dollars a week, which is a pretty fair-sized chunk of the earth to a young Swedish girl just learning to do a few loops and spirals in English and saving up the steamer fare to bring her sister over.

Mrs. Singer takes our nice, green, young hired girls, who are willing to do anything up to the capacity of a stout back, and she tries to make servants out of them.

She gives them embroidered aprons and caps and makes them keep house her way. And after they have spent a couple of months making coffee to suit Mrs. Singer, and going over the mahogany to suit Mrs. Singer, and arranging the magazines on the table to suit Mrs. Singer, and taking up the breakfast to Miss Sallie to suit Mrs. Singer, and going over the back hall again to suit Mrs. Singer, and keeping their mouths closed tightly all day to suit Mrs. Singer, and only going out on Thursday afternoons to suit Mrs. Singer, they sort of get tired of the job, and one after another they stop Mrs. Singer at a favorable moment and say these fatal words:

"Aye gass aye ent stay eny longer."

Then some Homeburg family joyfully seizes on the deserter, and Mrs. Singer starts out all over again on the job of making a servant out of a hired girl.

I have to admire the woman for her eternal grit. She won't give up for a

minute. She is going to run her house just so if she has to train up a million girls and lose them all. Half the time she has to do her own work, but I'll bet that when she has the luncheon ready she puts her little white lace napkin on her hair and comes in and announces it to herself in the proper style; and I'll bet, too, that she doesn't talk to herself while she is working in the kitchen, either. She says the way Homeburg women talk to their servants is disgraceful; that it lowers a servant's respect for her mistress. I'd give a lot to see Mrs. Singer looking at herself coldly in the glass after breakfast and giving herself orders for the day in a tone that would brook no familiarity whatever.

Our women-folks, who are familiar with the Singer residence, say that it is a beautiful thing full of monogrammed linen and embroidered towels and curtains that have to be washed as often as a white shirt, and that whenever they call they are pretty

sure to find Mrs. Singer trying to teach some new and slightly dizzy second girl how to take care of the house without breaking off the edges.

You observe the fluency and ease with which I say "second girl." We all do in Homeburg. We're used to talking about second girls since Mrs. Singer has tried to keep one. As far as her experience has taught us, we are firmly convinced that having a second girl is like having mumps on the other side too. When Mrs. Singer isn't busy trying to teach her cook how to run the oven and the plate heater and serve the soup all at the same time, she is attempting to give a new second girl some inkling of the general ideas of her duties. Trouble is most of them are ten-second girls. They listen to the program in the Singer household and then they sprint for safety to some family where they will work twice as hard, but will give three times as much satisfaction. Then Mrs. Singer arms

herself with the dust rag and clear-starch bowl, and subs on the job until she finds a new second girl — after which the cook gives up her job with a loud report, and Mr. Singer stays down-town for dinner at the Delmonico Hotel until the Singer house management is staved off the rocks again.

We feel sorry for the Singers and invite them out a good deal while they are hunting cooks. And they pay us back royally as soon as the household staff is fully recruited once more. We eat strange but delicious dishes made by a reluctant and mystified girl, plus Mrs. Singer's persuasiveness and will power; and said girl, still reluctant, and scared into the bargain, serves the dinner with a lace-edged apron and a napkin on her hair, Mrs. Singer egging her in loud whispers like the prompter in grand opera. Steering a green cook through a dinner party, and keeping up a merry conversation at the same time, calls for about as much social skill as anything

I know of. I myself stand in awe of Mrs. Singer.

As for the rest of us — we have no servant problem, having no servants. And about the only hired girl problem we have is the following: "Shall the girl eat with the family or in the kitchen?" Mrs. Singer wished that on us. Ten years ago there was no question at all. The girl ate with the family, and waited on the table when something was needed which couldn't be reached. Then Mrs. Singer came to town and made her eat in the kitchen, since which time the question has raged with more or less fury and the whole town has chosen up sides on it. Half of us want the girl to eat in the kitchen, and the other half are invincibly democratic and have her at the table.

As for the girls, they are divided too. Half of the girls who come to see about places ask us: "Do I have to eat in the kitchen?" and the other half ask: "Do

I have to eat with the family?" And of course it's just our luck that the people who wish to dine by themselves never can find girls who prefer the kitchen, and the people who insist on associating with their help usually lose them because said help has been spoiled somewhere else by being allowed to eat in the kitchen, far from the domestic squabbles and the children with the implacable appetite for spread bread.

But on the whole this problem doesn't bother us much, and our hired girls are a great comfort. They usually stay with us until they are married or retire from old age, and after they've been ten years in a house they're pretty much one of the family. The Payleys' girl has been with them sixteen years, as I said before, and when she wants to go to the opera-house to an entertainment, Wert Payley makes young DeLancey Payley take her. It's the only use he's found for DeLancey as yet. We keep out of the kitchen after supper,

unless too strongly pressed by thirst, because usually from seven to ten some hard-working young Swedish man sits bolt upright in a straight-backed chair, his head against the wall, discussing romance and other subjects of interest with a scared, resolute expression. Usually this goes on for about three years before anything happens. Then the girl admits, with some hesitation, that she is going to get married, and our wife or mother, as the case may be, hustles around and helps make the trousseau and pick out the linen. The wedding takes place in the parlor, and about a year later the young Swedish-American citizen who arrives is named after whatever member of our family is the most convenient as to sex.

We never entirely lose a good hired girl in Homeburg. They pass us on to their relatives when they are married, and come back to visit with great faithfulness. In this topsy-turvy Eldorado of ours where a

man sometimes becomes rich before he really knows what anything larger than five dollars looks like, many of our girls draw prizes in the shape of good farmers and prosperous young merchants. But their heads aren't turned by it. They come around in their new automobiles and take us out riding, just as if we had money too. The wife of our mayor used to work for us, and when the electric light gang stuck a light where it would shine straight into our back porch, thus reducing the value of our house 105 per cent. as a place of employment for a nice, attractive girl in summers, I stepped over to the mayor's office and asked him if he remembered how he used to sit on that porch himself. He smiled once, winked twice, and three minutes afterward four men were on their way to relocate that pole.

If I have any criticism of the hired girls in our town, it is because they go to Europe too much. Now, of course, it's no worse

for a hired girl to go to Europe for the summer than it is for any one else to indulge themselves in that way. But that's the irritating part. Nobody else goes. Outside of Mrs. Wert Payley and one or two school teachers, I don't suppose any Homeburg people have crossed the Atlantic. But half a dozen of our hired girls go every year. They leave late in the spring, and during the hot weary summer their mistresses toil patiently along keeping the job open if they can't find a substitute who will work for a few months, for the girls who go to Europe are usually pearls of great price and must be gotten back at all cost. I don't suppose anything is harder on the temper than to work over a hot kitchen stove all day in July, and then to sit down to supper, a damp and wilted mess of weariness, and read a souvenir card from your hired girl, said card depicting a cool and inviting Swedish meadow with snow-topped mountains in the distance.

Our girl has been to Europe three times. She has crossed on the *Mauretania*, the old *Deutschland* and the new *Olympic*. Two years from this summer she thinks she will try the *Imperator*. Often in the evening she tells us of the wonders of these great vessels — of the beauty of the sunset at sea, and of the smoke and noise and majesty of London. I suppose it indicates a jealous disposition, but it makes me mad sometimes to think that it takes practically all the money I can earn, working steadily and with two weeks off per year, to send that girl abroad.

Of course I don't mean it just that way. She doesn't get all of it. In fact she gets three dollars a week of it. Out of this she saves about three dollars and twenty-five cents because sometimes she gets a dollar extra for doing the washing. And when she goes to Europe for the summer on the same ship with the Astors and the Vanderbilts, it sounds more magnificent than it

really is. She is on the same ship, but about eleven decks down, in a corner of the steerage close to the stern, where the smells are rich and undisturbed. And she doesn't visit ruins and art galleries in Europe, but a huge circle of loving relatives, who pass her around from farm to farm for months, while she does amateur business agent work for the steamship lines, talking up the wonders of America and — allow me to blush — the saintliness of her employers, and coming blithely back home in the fall with three or four old childhood chums for roommates.

Just the same, I envy our girls. I wish I could go to Europe in the steerage, not being able to go any other way.

It's a fortunate thing for us that our hired girls do go back home and proselyte for America, or else we would soon be jam up against the real thing in help problems. If, for any reason, the Swedish nation should cease contributing to Homeburg,

we should have to do our own work. I often wonder at the things our American girls will do rather than to go on the fighting deck as commander of some one else's kitchen. Twenty-five of our girls go up to Paynesville every morning at six on the interurban and make cores in the rolling mills there all day. Carfare and board deducted, they get less than a good hired girl — and they don't go to Europe for the summers and never by any chance marry some rising young farmer who has made the first payment on a quarter section. Several of our middle-aged young ladies sew for a dollar a day and keep house by themselves. And there's Mary Smith, who has been a town problem. She's thirty-five and an orphan. She lives in a house about as large as a piano box and tries to scare away the wolf by selling flavoring extracts and taking orders for books. She's never more than two meals ahead of an embarrassing appetite. Every fall we dig

down and buy her winter coal, and she hasn't bought any clothes for ten years. Some one gives her an ex-dress and Mary does her best to make it over, but she never looks much more enticing than a scarecrow in the result.

Mary's hands are red with chilblains in the winter, and the poorhouse yawns for her. But will she take a place as hired girl? Not she. Mary has her pride. She'll sell you things you don't want, which is as near begging as graft is to politics, and she'll wear second-hand clothes and take home cold bread pudding from the hotel — but she will not be a hired girl and go to Europe in the summer and marry into an automobile. Once she did consent to become Mrs. Singer's second girl. Mrs. Singer was desperate, and after a long defense Mary consented on condition that she be called the "up-stairs maid." But she only lasted three days. Mary could have drawn five dollars a

week and Mrs. Singer's clothes, which would have fitted her. But Mary couldn't take orders — not that kind. She came back to take orders from us for a patent glass washtub or something of the kind — and we sighed wearily.

V

HOMEBURG'S LEISURE CLASS

It is not as large as New York's but it is twice as ingenious

CONFOUND it, Jim, I wish you hadn't told me that your friend Williston never worked a day in his life! You don't know how it disappointed me.

Why? Because I don't know when I have met a man whom I liked so much at first sight as I did Williston. He suited me from the ground up. I never spent a more interesting afternoon with any one. No matter what he did, he interested me — I enjoyed watching him handle his cigar as well as I did hearing him tell about his Amazon adventures. Says I to myself:

"Here is a man whose friendship I will win if I have to live in New York all my life to get it." And then you had to go and spoil it all.

Oh, yes, I know it's just my backwoods way of looking at things. I'm not saying what I do as a boast. I'm making a confession of it. I know why Williston doesn't work. It's because he owns a piano box full of bonds left by his late lamented pa, and when he was educated, the word "work" was crossed out of his spelling-book in red ink. And I'm not saying that he isn't a fine fellow. He's intelligent and witty and companionable and forty other desirable things. But he won't work. Somehow that sticks in my vision of him. It reminds me of the case of Mamie Gastit, who was the prettiest, best-dispositioned, and most capable girl in Homeburg, but who had a glass eye. We didn't hold it up against her, but it made us awfully sad. There were plenty of Homeburg girls who would

have been decorated by a glass eye. Why did Providence have to wish it on the finest girl in town?

You say it is no crime not to work in New York? Bless you, I know it. In fact, loafing in New York is the most fascinating business in the world. Why, it seems as if you New York men actually struggle to get spare time. I've sat in your office and watched you on Saturday morning working yourself into a blue haze in your efforts to get done early enough to cord up a fine big mess of leisure on Saturday afternoon. That's the difference between New York and Homeburg. In Homeburg you would have been stretching out your job to last until supper time — unless you were one of our nineteen golfers, or the roads were good enough to let you drive over to the baseball game at Paynesville.

Leisure in New York means pleasure, excitement, and seven dozen kinds of interest. But for many and many a long

year in hundreds of Homeburg homes, leisure has meant waiting for meal times — and not much of anything else.

City people laugh at country people for beating the chickens to roost. But what are you going to do when going to bed is the most fascinating diversion available after supper? I've noticed that as fast as a small town man discovers something else to do in the evening, his light bill goes up and up. When crokinole was introduced into Homeburg twenty odd years ago, the kerosene wagon had to make an extra mid-week trip. When the magazines came down from thirty-five cents to ten and you could get three of them and a set of books for one dollar down and a dollar a month until death did you part, they had to put an operator in the telephone exchange after 8 P. M. because of the general sleeplessness. When the automobile came, and when two moving picture theaters, a Chautauqua, and a Lyceum

course opened fire in one year, and the business men fitted up a club with an ancient pool table in it, Homeburg got chummy with all the evening hours, and kicked so hard about the electric lights going off at midnight that the company had to run them an hour longer. And I suppose if any invader ever puts in an all-night restaurant where you can have lobster and a soubrette on the table at the same time, a certain proportion of us will get as foolish as you are and will forget how to go to bed at all by artificial light.

We've changed that much from the past generation. We know what to do with leisure in the evening. But we're still awkward and embarrassed when we meet it by daylight. Since we have built our Country Club, a few of us have learned to enjoy ourselves in a fitful and guilty fashion late in the afternoon. But as a rule, even to-day, when you give a Home-

burg man a bright golden daylight hour of leisure, he has no more use for it than he would have for a five-ton white elephant with an appetite for ice-cream. And that, Jim, is why I can't speed myself up to appreciate a young man who has never worked and never intends to. I still have to look at him with my Homeburg eyes. And in Homeburg, when a man doesn't work when he has a chance and takes what amusement we have to offer as a steady diet in perfect content, we know something is the matter with him — and we are sorry for him.

Leisure has killed more people in Homeburg than work ever did. For years our biggest problem was the job of keeping our retired farmers alive. When a farmer has worked forty years or so, and has accumulated a quarter section of land, and a few children who need high school education, he rents his farm and moves into town, where he lives comfortably on eighty

dollars a month and fills a tasty tomb in a very few years. It isn't so hard on the farmer's wife, because she takes her housework into town with her and keeps busy. But when the farmer has settled down in town, far from a chance to work, he discovers that he has about fourteen hours of leisure each day on his hands and nothing to do with them but to eat. Out of regard for his digestion he can't eat more than three hours a day. That leaves him eleven hours in which to go down-town for the mail and do the chores around the house.

He stands it pretty well the first year. The second year is so long that he begins to lay plans for his centennial, and about the third year he takes to his bed and dies, with a sigh of relief. That's what leisure does to a Homeburg man who isn't used to it. And that is one of the reasons why, when I see a man in New York with nothing to do from choice, I think of the sad

army of the unemployed in Homeburg draping themselves around the grain office every day in fine weather, and wearing away the weary years in idleness because they are too old to work, and don't have to, anyway.

Of late years we have been working earnestly to conserve our retired farmers. They are fine men, and we hate to see them wasted. We have been trying to reduce their leisure — just as a city man tries to reduce his flesh. We elect them to everything possible. We have taught a number of them how to play pool in the Commercial Club. We have started a farmers' elevator, a farmers' bank and a planter factory, and have got them to invest money. That has been a godsend, because it has kept a large number of them busy and happy trying to save the said money. But where we have saved one retired farmer, the automobile has saved ten. Whenever one of our unemployed comes

out with a machine, we sigh with relief and stop worrying about him. It's just the same as if he had been given wings and a world to explore. In summer, our retired farmers who have autos loaf around the country from Indiana to Idaho and talk crops in the garages of a thousand towns. And in winter they rebuild their cars, and talk good roads. Twenty years ago you could talk good roads to a farmer or bang him with a club, with the same result. But last year our retired farmers organized a good roads association, and to amuse themselves they have dragged the roads for miles around and have built a mile of rock road leading south to the cemetery — where in the old April days, as Henry Snyder says, the deceased was buried once, but the mourners got buried twice — going out and coming back.

We have a real leisure class in Homeburg, however, outside of the retired farmers, who really can't help themselves.

Our genuine metropolitan leisure class consists of DeLancey Payley and Gibb Ogle. They are, as far as I know, the only two people in Homeburg who loaf from choice year in and year out in perfect content. We have done our best with both of them, but we have given up. Leisure is what they were created for. It is a talent with them, and their only talent. They have developed it to the best of their ability.

DeLancey's is the saddest case, because so much money was wasted on him. Wert Payley is the richest man in our part of the country. He owns a bank and one or two counties out West. He sent DeLancey East to school, where he was educated regardless of expense or anything else and was returned a few years ago a finished product, sublime, though a little terrifying to look at, and reeking with knowledge of one kind or another. I have heard it said that DeLancey can tell offhand what has been the correct thing in dress for

each of the last thirty-five years, and that he can handle as many as fifteen articles of cutlery and forkery at a dinner table with absolute accuracy.

DeLancey has been at home almost ten years now, and his chief mission has been to ornament Homeburg and add to its elegance on state occasions. His father had designed him for a captain of finance, and when he first came home DeLancey was put in the bank in order that he might work up by degrees into the bond business or some other auriferous form of toil. Wert Payley almost had nervous prostration from overwork that year, and in the end he had to give up. He couldn't carry his own load and make DeLancey work too. It was too much. No human being should be asked to do it. Wert often says that if he had had nothing else to do he could have kept DeLancey at work at least part of the time, but that he was too old to shoulder the task on top

of his other duties. So DeLancey left the bank, except as an enthusiastic check casher, and took up his life work — I mean that, of course, figuratively. I mean his life occupation — hang it, that won't do either! He took up his mission — the work for which his ardent young soul was fitted. He began to specialize in leisure.

For close to nine years DeLancey has loafed. It is a miracle to us. We can't understand his endurance. Yet he thrives on it. Wert Payley has given up trying to make him work, but he has taken what he considers to be an awful revenge. He has refused to spend one cent for carfare. DeLancey can hang around Homeburg until he dies, but if he wants to leave, he must earn the money himself. And DeLancey hasn't been fifty miles from Homeburg since he slipped the clutch out of his tired, throbbing brain and let it rest, nine years ago.

We have to admire his ingenuity. He kills time so scientifically. They say it takes him two hours to do himself up in the morning after he gets out of bed, and that he has almost as many beautifying tools as an actress. He doesn't get downtown before ten. It takes him from fifteen minutes to half an hour to buy his morning cigar. That is, he talks to McMuggins, the druggist, as long as Mac will stand for it. Mac has a regular schedule. If Delancey buys a ten-cent cigar, Mac will talk with him fifteen minutes. If he buys a fifteen-cent cigar, he will talk half an hour, if business isn't too brisk. Mac keeps a box of fifteen-cent cigars especially for DeLancey, but he says it is an awful risk. If DeLancey were to die on him, he couldn't sell those cigars in a hundred years.

The tellers at the bank are good for fifteen minutes or so after DeLancey has bought his cigar; he strolls in and gossips

with them until his father begins to snort ominously in his little railed-off pen marked "President." Cooney Simpson, the tailor, likes DeLancey, and they talk clothes for half an hour almost every morning. Then it's noon, and this is his hardest problem, because every one goes to dinner at noon except the Payleys and Singers, who have luncheon at one. If DeLancey can find Sam Singer, he is all right. But Sam, who used to loaf enthusiastically with him, has rosy ideas about Mabel Andrews now, and he is working hard in his father's bank and on the farms. It was a bitter day for DeLancey when Sam went to work. It almost shook his faith in idleness. But he stood firm.

Luncheon kills two hours for DeLancey, and then he goes up to the Homeburg Commercial Club and shoots the pool balls around the table until 4:30, waiting eagerly for some one to stop working and come to play with him. Sometimes they

come and sometimes they don't. If they don't, he goes down to the hotel and talks with a traveling man. I often see him in the lobby of the Delmonico, sitting in magnificent ease, blowing large smoke rings and talking with an air of unconscious grandeur to some eager-eyed drummer, who is delighted but mystified at the ease with which he is breaking into the first families. DeLancey has a quiet way of talking about the East and the great people thereof which fools even us sometimes.

DeLancey makes his toilet after dinner at night and that of course kills an hour or more. Then he calls on Madeline Hicks, old Judge Hicks's daughter, when she will let him. He has an idea he would like to marry her, but while she likes him, they say she can't bring herself to marry a man of leisure and have the whole town sorry for her. But he takes her to all the parties, and about once a week his father

lets him have the automobile, if the chauffeur doesn't want to use it. On other nights DeLancey comes down-town and buys another cigar at the restaurant. It is as good as a show to see DeLancey buy his evening cigar. You'd think he was taking over a railroad, he chooses it with such care. The young farmer boys and the workers in the factory come down-town at night and loaf around the restaurants without any excuse. They have to kill the time. But that would be too coarse work for DeLancey. He doesn't come down-town to loaf — Oh, no! He has merely dropped in on his orbit. It takes him half the evening to buy his cigar and smoke it, conversing as he does so with a few selected citizens on the benefits of slim-cut clothes and the origin of the pussy-cat hat.

Sometimes DeLancey can abduct some busy young chap and make him play a round of golf on week-day afternoons,

but not often. That's the difference between our clubs and yours. We have clubs, but we don't use them. We wouldn't think of spending time there if we could spend it at business. Nothing is lonelier on week days than our golf club, and one of the chief duties of the caretaker at the Commercial Club is to dust off the reading table. We have our clubs, and that is the main object. We know that they are there, and that we could enjoy them if we wanted to. Perhaps we do want to. But it's a hard art to learn. And, oh, how patiently and earnestly DeLancey is trying to teach us! If it were any one but he, we might learn faster. But he sort of figures as a horrible example. It's like a battered and yellowed wreck advocating cigarettes, or a bald-headed barber pushing his own hair tonic.

Gibb Ogle, the other member of our leisure class, is a very different kind of a bird. His art is more sublime than De-

Lancey's because he has no one to support him. He has worked down to his present state from nothing at all. He is a self-unmade man. With no resources, not even a loving wife with a wash tub, he lives a life of perfect ease and idleness. He doesn't even have to hunt for means of killing time, as DeLancey does. Time with him dies a natural death. He is not implicated in the sad event in any way. All he does is to watch its demise. He watches whole hours pass away while leaning against the door-frame of the Delmonico Hotel. Chet Frazier and Sim Bone got into an argument one day, and to settle it they went over and took Gibb away from the building. It didn't fall, and Sim won. Gibb has watched several thousand hours expire while propping up the Q. B. & C. depot. He is the chief spectator at every fire, runaway, dog fight and public event. He is a movable landmark, as permanent as the Republican

flagpole in the city park. I have never yet gone down-town in the morning without seeing Gibb on the street. And very seldom have I gone home at night, even in the howling blizzards of winter, without passing Gibb leaning against the warm bright show window of the last open place of business, and waiting with placid greediness for one final event of some kind to transpire before going to his well-earned repose.

Beside Gibb's leisure, DeLancey's is poor amateurish stuff. Gibb's total income during the year would hardly exceed twenty-five dollars, and it doesn't do him much good at that. When he gets any money, he eats it up in the most determined and hasty fashion. I have seen him eat a dollar's worth of ham sandwiches in an afternoon — because he had the dollar. What he does between dollars is a town mystery. He doesn't beg. He is believed by some to absorb sustenance

from the air, like a plant. But I happen to know that he absorbs a good deal of sustenance from the Delmonico Hotel. He has attached himself to this hotel as a sort of retainer, and through all its changes of ownership he has hung on. He will not work, but he gives the place his moral support and speaks highly of it to all comers. He will even carry a satchel across to the depot, but only as an accommodation to the hotel. In return he asks nothing and thus saves his proud spirit from the insult of a refusal. But I think he has first pick of the scattered remains of the dinners that leave the kitchen door whenever the cook is good-natured.

I say I think so, because few of us have seen Gibb Ogle eat. He has a pride, and performs this humiliating act in secret. But grocers tell me that he is always offering to dispose of broken-up crackers, stale cheese and old mackerel. "I'll just carry that out for you," he says. And they

understand and let him do it. One night as he hurried past me, a package dropped from under his coat and broke at my feet. It was food — dry bread and a bologna skin with a little meat in the end. He stopped and told me how hard it was to find food for a dog in which he was interested. But that was a fib. With all his faults Gibb never maintained a dog in idleness.

In summers Gibb leads a care-free, happy life, sunning himself all day and sleeping comfortably at night in any one of a dozen places. He is our village grasshopper, taking no thought of the chill future. How he lives through our fierce winters is a mystery. He sleeps in barns. He sleeps on the coal in the electric light power house. If the clerk at the hotel happens to be a friend of his, he curls up in a chair in the lobby. Sometimes all of these fail him. I have heard that he spent one winter in an empty room over a

store, and thawed out his toes on several mornings. We are always afraid some crackling January dawn will find Gibb frozen hard on the streets, and it is a relief when spring comes and he begins to fatten up a little and drink in sunshine again.

We'd like to send Gibb to the county home. Some of us are even willing to contribute to his support, scandalous as it would be. But it is hard to do, because Gibb is no pauper. He is a gentleman of leisure with the dignity of an Indian. His worn suits are neat, and he is as dapper with a battered hat and a four-year-old celluloid collar as if he spent real money on his wardrobe. He chooses his life and lives it without complaint. Periodically we strive heroically to make him work. The boys at the planter factory, who are a rough lot but have some hold on Gibb because they entertain him out of their lunch boxes, kidnap him about twice a year and drag him in to the superintend-

ent to get a job for him. Gibb protests frantically that he has business which can't be neglected — that he is just closing a deal for a good position at the hotel — that he is going away on a trip — but nothing helps him. He accepts the job with ill-concealed horror, and the factory boys climb up on the roof of the main building and hoist a flag. We all know what it means. Gibb is working again. And we all know what will happen next.

About two days later Gibb will be limping to the factory very late with his off-foot done up in an enormous comforter. "That's what you have done, boys," he will say with simple dignity, "you've hurt that old sore foot of mine. It's never been right since I hurt it with the fire company. It's in awful shape now. I guess I'll lose it at last. You oughtn't to have done it, boys. Goodness knows, I'd have worked all these years if I'd had any foot to speak of."

Then he goes in and resigns — after which the foot recovers in great haste, and Gibb stands on it relentlessly twelve hours a day in the old way, while he watches the world go round and waits for the judgment day.

You'd think from the way we hammer at both DeLancey and Gibb to go to work that they would hang together, being in the same class. But they don't. In fact they have the greatest contempt for each other. DeLancey will not speak to Gibb, and thinks it is a crime that he isn't sent to the stone pile; while Gibb speaks of DeLancey in pitying accents as a young man who ought to know better than to waste his time herding a little white pill into a hole in a cow pasture. Gibb is very severe on the frivolities of the prosperous. He can't bear to see them frittering away their time.

That's our leisure class in Homeburg, and it isn't growing. If it was we'd be

worried, and the Commercial Club would hold meetings about it. And I'm just telling you these things so that you'll see why I am so warped and foolish regarding Williston; it's just my small town ignorance — My, I wish that chap would get a job!

VI

HOMEBURG'S WORST ENEMY

How Old Man Opportunity Stands Outside the Town and Beckons to her Greatest Men

YOU don't say, Jim! Gosh, let me look! Where? Behind the big fellow in the two-gallon plug hat? There — I see him! Yes, sir! It's he! I could tell him anywhere. Do you suppose we could get up nearer? What, go up in the elevator with him? Say, I haven't the nerve. No, I don't want — This is close enough — Why, there isn't even a crowd! You mean to say he comes down here just like this right along? Do you see him often?

Why, when I go home and tell the boys

I watched Teddy Roosevelt go down the street common as dirt and could have gone up in the same elevator with him, they'll want me to give a lecture in the Woodmen Hall. It certainly beats all what you can see in New York for nothing.

That's where you have all the luck, Jim — you big city folks. You keep your interesting people at home; there's nowhere bigger for them to go. No matter how famous or successful they are, they have to stick around and mingle unless they get Europitis of the intellect. When you grow up with a chum in New York and he discovers a talent that has been kicking around in his garret ever since he was born, you don't lose him. He just stays at home and grows up to fit the town. But when I want to see my old Homeburg playmates who have succeeded, I have to go to New York or Chicago or San Francisco, or some other big place where old Opportunity keeps a wrecking

crew busy all the time beating in doors. Opportunity doesn't come into a small town and knock. He stands outside and beckons.

Life in Homeburg is one long bereavement because of this fact. Seems as if the world was always looking Homeburg men over, the way a housewife looks over an asparagus patch, and yanking out the ones who stick up a little higher than the rest. We don't worry about the good who die young in Homeburg; but the interesting who go early and forget to come back make us sad and sore. No sooner does a Homeburg man begin to broaden out and get successful and to hoist the town upward as he climbs himself, than we begin to grieve. We know what is coming. Presently he will go down to the *Democrat* office and insert a notice, advertising for sale a seven-room house with gas and water, good cistern, orchard with bearing trees, good barn and milch cow, cement

walks and watertight cellar. And he will sell that place at a sacrifice, which he can well afford, and go off to the city, where he will learn to wear a fur-lined coat, kick about the financial legislation and visit us on Christmas Day once per decade.

I sometimes wonder what Homeburg would be like if all her bright boys and girls should come back. Don't suppose the town could hold them at all. It would be stretched out of shape in a week. But it would be a glorious place to live in, and wouldn't we shine in art and music and politics and finance — to say nothing of baseball! Suppose we had Forrest Brady back home, catching for the Homeburg team! He gets seven thousand dollars a year from Boston now; but I remember when he helped put dents in Paynesville baseball pride for nothing, and would pay some youngster a quarter to hustle baggage at the depot in his absence. And suppose the Congregational choir still had

Mary Saunders! Why, we could charge a dollar a seat for ordinary services, and people would come down from Chicago to attend! When I think what she gets for one concert now, and then think how long the Ladies' Aid Society has been working to paint the church and haven't made it yet, it makes me wish we could put Homeburg on wheels and haul it after some of our distinguished children. And what if we had Alex McQuinn to write up the *Democrat* again? Every month we almost ruin ourselves at home buying all the magazines he writes for; but when he was a fat young thing in spectacles hunting locals and trying to write funny things for the *Democrat*, he wasn't appreciated at all. Old Judge Hicks, who had no sense of humor, chased him several miles once for telling how he tried to stop the 4:11 train by yelling "Whoa" at it. And Editor Ayers had to fire Alex to keep the peace.

When Rollin Derby, who draws pic-

tures for your New York paper, went to school, he could climb a tree by digging his bare toes into the rough bark, but was not otherwise distinguished. When Maurice Gadby was a boy in Homeburg, he went barefooted in summer with the rest of us, and who could have guessed that he would grow up to give tango teas for your four hundred and only allow the better quality of them to pay him twenty-five dollars per cup at that? But the career that amuses me most is Jack Nixon — "Shinner" Nixon, we used to call him. He commands a battleship for a living now; and Homeburg is exactly seven miles from the nearest stream that is navigable by a duck. We used to walk out to that stream Saturday mornings, spend four hours building a dam and then swim painfully on our elbows and knees in the puddle we had made until dark, but Shinner wouldn't go in. He was a regular young Goethals when it came to dam building,

but he abhorred water, especially behind the ears.

Back of my generation the batting average was just about as good. It seemed to have been the fashion of Homeburg boys of thirty years ago to go out and run Nebraska politically. Two governors and a representative have come from our town. If we had them here now, we wouldn't have to fight so desperately to get a county surveyor or coroner on the ticket every four years. Samuel P. Wiggins, who now lives in a stone hut covering an acre in Chicago and owns a flock of flour mills, was once Sam Wiggins, who bought grain in our town and married the daughter of one of our most reliable washerwomen. She comes back occasionally now, and we can't see but that she's as nice as she used to be when she hauled our family wash home in a little wagon every Saturday night. Being rich hasn't hurt her at all, though it has spoiled her figure

beyond the utmost and most heartrending efforts of her clothes to conceal.

Then there's Mrs. Maysworth. When she comes down from Chicago for a visit, the old town fairly hums for a month. We pick up our interest in art and woman's suffrage and cheap trips to Europe and Dante's *Inferno;* the Shakespeare Club is revived, the bookstore sells its copy of Browning, and the tone of the afternoon teas goes up about two hundred per cent. Mrs. Maysworth was the ruling spirit of a little bunch of prosperous Homeburg people who lived at the end of Milk Street — we used to call it the cream end of Milk Street. When they were with us, Homeburg was called the Athens of the Steenth Congressional District. We heard singers and lecturers, who jumped towns of fifty thousand on either side of us. We had state presidents of Women's Federations and Church Societies. We had a free library before Mr. Carnegie had a bank

account. North Milk Street established it, and every Saturday afternoon the muddy feet of the tough south side kids scuffled over Mrs. Maysworth's hardwood floors, the first west of Chicago, while their owners drew out books, the said library being located in an extinct conservatory, which protruded from the house like a large wart.

Homeburg was a Mecca of learning and refinement in those days; and then six of these families pulled out in the same year and moved to Chicago, where they could soak up a little more culture instead of giving away all they had. They left a chasm in our midst as big as the Grand Canyon. It never has been filled — for me at least. I feel, when I wander up that fine old shady street, past those houses filled with people who are only as wise as I am, as if I were wandering through the deserted haunts of an ancient and irreplaceable civilization.

That's the way it goes with us — one bereavement after another. It's mighty hard to be a mother of sons in Homeburg. I worked in the post-office for a year once — handed out mail — and I got to know just exactly what most of the mothers in town wanted. I could please them with a new magazine and mystify them with a circular or a business letter. But if I wanted to light them up until they took the shadows out of the corners as they went out, I would give them a letter from a son, way off somewhere, making good. The best of them didn't write any too often. Once a week is pretty regular, I suppose, from the other end; but you should see the mother begin to come in hungry again the second day after her letter came. And when a boy came home successful and prosperous, and his proud mother towed him down Main Street on pretense of getting him to carry a spool of thread home for her, it used to go to

my heart to see the wistful looks of her women friends. There is hardly a family in Homeburg of the right age which hasn't a grown-up son off at war somewhere — fighting failure. It's grand when they win; but I hate to think of some of our boys who haven't come back.

If it's hard on the mothers, it's even harder on the Homeburg girls. They say there are one hundred thousand old maids in Massachusetts. I'll bet that's just about the number of Massachusetts young men who have gone West or somewhere, and haven't remembered the things they said at parting as well as the girls did. We've got plenty of girls in Homeburg who are getting intimately acquainted with the thirties — fine girls, still pretty, bright, and keeping up with the world. Young men come into town and do their best to get on a "thou-beside-me" footing, but somehow the girls don't seem to marry. At the root of almost every case

there's an old Homeburg boy. Maybe he's making good somewhere, and they're both waiting until he does. Maybe he isn't making good and is too proud to ask her to wait. Maybe she's waiting alone — because some other girl was handier in the new place. And maybe it wasn't a case of wait at all, only the boy who went away looked better to some Homeburg girl than any of those who stayed at home. That was the case with Sam Flanburg and Minnie Briggs a few years ago.

Sam is on the Chicago Board of Trade and is one of our old-time boys. Two years ago he came back, roaringly prosperous, to visit for the first time since he had left, and pretty suddenly he discovered to his amazement that on packing up ten years before he'd left a pearl of great price behind, said pearl being Minnie. In other words he fell in love over his ears with her, and Minnie, who was one of our very nicest girls, with a disposition like

triple distilled extract of charity, treated him like a dog. He stayed around for a month cluttering up the Briggs's front porch day and night, while Minnie put up an imitation of haughty indifference and careless frivolity which was as good as a show for every one in town except Sam, who couldn't see through it. That's one of our small town assets — you get to look on at most of the love affairs. We watched Minnie and Sam with our hearts in our mouths for fear she'd carry it too far and lose him, for every one had it straight from Mary Askinson, who is intimately acquainted with a close friend of Minnie's old school chum, that Minnie had been in love with Sam since they graduated from the high school together. It was all we could do from breaking in and interfering, especially when Sam went off his feed and began to throw out ugly talk about going to the Philippines or some place where fever can be gotten cheap. But one morn-

ing Sam came down-town, and the first man who saw his face called up his wife and told her the good news. Talk about extra editions for distributing news! Before a city paper could have gotten an extra on the street, five intimate friends of Minnie's had dropped in casually to see her, and when they saw her face, of course they fell on her neck. Sam told Chet Frazier next day that it made him so mad to think he'd lived twenty years in the same town with Minnie and had never appreciated his blessings that he felt like climbing Pikes Peak and kicking himself off.

There's Mary Smith. She's our prize old maid and dresses like a mail sack full of government seeds, but they say she was the prettiest girl in Homeburg when young Cyrus McCord went to Chicago to carve out his future so that he could come home and marry her. But Cyrus didn't carve out his future. He married it in-

stead, and Mary is almost fifty now, living alone and getting peculiar, like so many of our lonely old folks do.

Taking it all around, you can't blame us for feeling a little bit hostile to the big grabby towns which reach out like tax collectors every year and take a tithe of our boy and girl crop — first choice too. But of course we're enormously proud of our Homeburg people who go out and help run the world, and we watch their careers like hawks. When Chester Arnett was running for a state office out West, I'll bet twenty Homeburg families subscribed for a Denver paper to read about him; and when Deacon White was making his great plunges in Wall Street, Homeburg looked at the financial page of the Chicago papers first and then read the baseball. We're as happy over their success as if they were our children — but it's always embarrassing for a little while when a Homeburg man who has made good comes

back to visit in the old town. We're aching to rush up and wring his arm off, but we want to know how he feels about it first. One or two experiences have made us gun-shy. We can't forget Lyla Enbright, who moved away with her family years ago and married a national bank or something of the kind in the East. She didn't come home for ten years, but finally the father died and Lyla came back to sell off some property. A lot of us had made mud pies with Lyla, and while she hadn't shown any great genius in that or anything else, she was jolly and we liked her, so we tried to rush up and greet her rapturously.

Those who didn't do it say it was one of the funniest things that ever happened in Homeburg, but I couldn't see it at the time. I was one of the rushers. Lyla waited until my outstretched hand was within reaching distance, and then she pulled a lorgnette on me. Say, Jim, did

you ever get right squarely in range of both barrels of an honest-for-God lorgnette with about a thousand dollars worth of dry goods and a pinch of brains behind it? If my turn ever comes to face a Gatling gun I hope to march right up to it like a little man — but lorgnettes? No! Any hostile army could lick Homeburg by aiming lorgnettes at it. I gave one look at the thing and fell over myself in heaps getting away. I wouldn't speak to Sim Bone for a week because he laughed. But after I had recovered a little, I hunted up Chet Frazier in a hurry and told him Lyla wanted to see him. By that I got even with Chet for about a dozen practical jokes. When he got in range of that lorgnette, he said "Gosh!" and actually ran. Then we survivors lined up and got some comfort out of it, watching the rest get theirs.

As I said, Lyla and one or two others who have brought home their prosperous and expanded corporal beings, and noth-

ing else to speak of, have made us a little timid about greeting our successful Prods. We hang around all ready for action, but we need encouragement. We wouldn't speak first for a farm. We wait for some calloused gabbler to break the ice. Gibb Ogle usually does it. Gibb would act as a reception committee for the Angel Gabriel without a quiver. He's always on the street, anyway, propping up some building or other, and he is always willing to waddle up to a returned governor or financier or rising young business man, and stick out his unwashed paw, while we hold our breath and wait for the result.

As a rule it's cheering. Our Homeburg boys don't fall down once in twenty times. No matter who the visitor is, he grabs Ogle's hand and yells: "Why, hello, Gibb, you fat old scoundrel, how's your sore foot?" Then we crowd around and fight for the next turn, and go home and hastily spread the news that So-and-so

has come home big and prosperous as all get-out, and not spoiled a bit.

Sometimes they don't come back at all, of course, and nervy scouts who look up the delinquents in their city offices come back with badly frosted ears and spread the warning. But there are few of these. Even President Banks of the great F. C. & L. Railroad System, who played on the Homeburg baseball nine thirty-five years ago, will stop puzzling over the financial situation long enough to give the glad hand to a Homeburg man during office hours. Of course I don't mean that any one from Homeburg can break in on him and pile his desk full of feet. You have to be a thirty-third degree Homeburger from his standpoint; that is, you or your father must have stolen apples with him — I belong to the inner lodge. My father and President Banks ate a peck of peaches one night in Frazier's orchard, between them, and got half way through the pearly

gates before they were yanked back by two doctors. That's why Banks took me to lunch when I went to call on him last month. If the Government would let him, he'd give me a pass home.

I'll never forget the day when Banks came back to Homeburg. He hadn't been back for thirty years and hadn't the slightest intention of coming either, as he admitted afterward. But he was going through on his special car, and old Number Eleven, which was hauling him, performed the most intelligent act of its career. The engine broke down right at the depot, and when Banks found he was in for an hour or two, he got out and strolled down Main Street to see the town in which he had begun his life.

It was a most depressing occasion. No one who had ever come back had changed as much as Banks. If he had worn a pigtail and talked Choctaw, he couldn't have grown farther away. It wasn't his fault.

He tried his best. But he hadn't talked our language for years. He couldn't get down near enough to converse. He passed most of his playmates without remembering them, but when he saw Pash Wade's sign, he went in and shook hands with him. About forty of us came in to trade and watched him do it. It was pathetic. They stood there like strangers from different lands, Banks trying to unbutton his huge, thick ulster of dignity, and not succeeding, and Pash trying to say something that would interest Banks — along the line of high finance of course — state of the country, etc. They gave it up in a minute, and Banks went out. He found Pelty Amthorne and shook hands with him. Pelty is pretty loquacious as a rule, but he couldn't talk to Banks — not that Banks, anyway. He'd never seen him before. He said "How-dy-do," and, "It's a long time since you were here," and Banks said, "It is indeed. I hope you

and your family are well." And then Pelty oozed hastily back into the crowd with a relieved air as if he had done his duty, and Banks looked bored and took out his watch. But just then Sim Askinson came up all out of breath and burst through the crowd.

Sim is little and meek and has a hard time holding his own, even in our peaceful world. But when he saw Banks, he snorted like a war horse and grew up three inches.

"Hello, Pudge, you old son-of-a-gun!" he said, with both hands in his pockets.

"Hello, Sim!" said Banks, sort of startled.

"Where'd you come from?" demanded Sim, "and why ain't you come before? You're a nice friendly cuss, you are. Sucked any turkey eggs lately?"

"No, you knock-kneed dishwasher," said Banks as a grin began to edge its way across his face. "Have you tried to sell any more toads for bullfrogs?"

"No, nor I ain't fought out any bumblebees' nest since the time you got one up your pant leg and pretty near pounded yourself to death with a ball bat," said Sim. "Can you still run as fast as the time Wert Payley and I dared you to ride Malstead's bull?"

"Where's Wert?" demanded Banks. They were shaking hands now, using all four of them. "Say, I've got to see him and Wim. Horn. I've got to leave in a few minutes."

"Like fun you have," growled Sim, linking arms with Banks. "You seem to think some one's chasing you. You're going to stay all night, that's what you're going to do."

"I am not," said Banks; "and I wouldn't stay with you, anyway. You had a garter snake in the bed last time I slept with you. I've got to see some more of the boys, though."

"He thinks he's going away in a few

minutes," said Sim to Wert Payley, who had heard his name and was now shaking hands with Banks. "Why, the old fat snide, nobody wants to see him outside of Homeburg. He's going to get a free supper to-night. Remember Sadie Warren?"

"Remember!" shouted Banks. "What do you think I am? — Methuselah? I remember more things than you ever heard of. Why, Sadie and I went skating the night you couldn't find your fat horse and sleigh."

"Ya-a-a—" yelled Payley, with a sudden shriek of laughter. "Never knew who took your rig, did you, Sim?"

"You — you —" said Sim, glaring at Banks. "You confounded horse thief, I believe you took Sadie in my own sleigh."

"Ain't he bright, Pudge," gasped Payley, "only took him thirty years to catch on."

"Well, Banksie," said Sim, "Sadie's been

more particular about her young men since that night. We've been married twenty-five years, and I guess I'll let you come up and eat this evening, anyway. She lets me bring most any old pelter home."

"Gosh, boys, I can't."

"Say, what are you? the porter on that varnished car down there?" demanded Sim. "Won't they let you off a minute?"

"Tell you what we'll do," said Pelty Amthorne. "We'll take you to band practice to-night. Sim still runs it, but he won't let me play any more."

"I haven't touched a horn since I left Homeburg," laughed Banks. "But I'd give ten dollars to see you and Wimble Horn blat away on those altos again, with your eyes bulging out of your cheeks."

"We'll get Wimble and we'll break up band practice if you'll stay over."

"I —"

"No, you don't," said Sim. "I won't have riff-raff loafing around my band."

"You won't, eh?" said Banks. "We'll show you. Come down to the car while I send about forty telegrams, and then we'll fix you, Mister Askinson."

Which they did that night, while most of the town looked on. The next fall Banks came back and stayed three days, and his conduct and that of his old companions in crime set an example to our younger generation which didn't wear off for years. They went out orchard robbing in an automobile, and Banks said he never realized before the wonder of modern conveniences.

VII

THE HOMEBURG WEEKLY DEMOCRAT

Which Swamps the Post-Office Every Friday

NO, Jim, as I have already said about thirty-four times this week, I don't care for a paper. Don't buy one for me. I could read your New York papers for twenty-four hours at a stretch, and at the end of the time I would have to stop some good-natured looking chap and ask what the news was. It's all there, I know, but I don't seem able to find it. Even the Chicago baseball scores are hidden in the blamed things. Instead of putting them first, the way they ought to, they stick them down at the end of the page. As for the editorial pages, I might as well go to Labrador and hunt for per-

sonal friends as to read them. If there's anything that makes a stranger feel about ten thousand miles from home, with the cars not running, it is to get into the editorial page of an unknown newspaper and try to sit in with the family discussions. It makes me feel like a man who has gotten into a reunion of the Old Settlers' Association of Zanzibar by mistake.

It's not much of a trick to go into a strange town and learn to navigate from hotel to hotel, but it's a hopeless task to try to find your way around a strange newspaper. Takes about two years to learn to read a strange newspaper skilfully, anyway, and find your way through it without banging into the want ads when you want to find the editorials, and tripping over the poets' column when you are hunting for the crop reports. You've been buying a paper every time you turned a corner for the last week, Jim — you New Yorkers seem to have to have a paper

about as often as a whale needs a new lungful of air — and I've taken a hasty look at all of them, but when I get home I am going to ask my wife what has happened in the U. S. while I've been away from Homeburg. Outside of the eternal Mexican case, I don't seem to have discovered a thing.

Mind you, I don't blame your papers for bearing down hard on the local news. I suppose it's mighty interesting to you New Yorkers to learn every morning just how much more money you owe on your new subway, and whether or not the temperature of Mrs. Van Damexpense's second-best Siberian wolf-hound is still rising. That's what newspapers are for — to save you the trouble of stepping around and collecting the events of the day from the back fence. But your papers don't bear down hard enough on the Homeburg happenings, and that's why they don't suit me.

I don't pretend that our Homeburg paper is the equal of yours in any particular. The best I can say for it is that it's no worse than it was ten years ago. It hasn't any three-story type, and you could read it for years without discovering who was being divorced in San Francisco or murdered in Chicago. People who depend on it don't know yet that war has been declared in the Balkans, and they won't hear any more politics until 1916. All week long I think as little about the paper as all this. But somehow, when Thursday evening comes around, rain or shine, I step over to the post-office, and if my paper isn't there, I wait a few minutes, growing more impatient all the time, and then I drift over to the door of the *Homeburg Weekly Democrat* office and join the silent throng.

Like as not I'll find twenty people there. We don't expect any wild news. There will probably not be anything in the *Dem-*

ocrat when it comes out, but we want to make sure of it. We don't want to go home without the paper. We've read it for twenty years, and every week we open it up and poke through its internals after a sensation that will stand Homeburg on its ear and split the Methodist church from steeple to pipe organ. We're as patient as fishers in the Seine, and the fact that the world has never rocked when the *Democrat* did come out doesn't discourage us any.

We want our paper, and so we stand there and grumble. Now and then one of us stumps up the narrow hallway to the second story where the *Democrat* makes its lair, and looks on with an abused air while two young lady compositors claw around the bottom of the boxes for enough type to set the last items, and the foreman stuffs the forms of the last two pages with old boiler plate, medicine ads and anything that will fill. There isn't any reason

for the *Democrat* being late any more than there is for the branch accommodation train, which got almost to town on time once and stood beyond the crossing for twenty minutes because her conductor forgot just when she was due and didn't want to run in too soon. The *Democrat* is just late naturally. It's part of its function to be late. Makes it more eagerly sought after. We talk with the foreman and make nuisances of ourselves generally, and presently old man Ayers, who runs the paper, waddles in with another item to be set. The compositors set down their sticks with a jerk and say, "Oh, my land!" and the foreman goes and puts the item on the case with that air of patient resignation which is a little more irritating than a swift kick; and then Chet Frazier, if he's hanging around, which he usually is, speaks up:

"For goodness' sakes, Ayers, let that item go and get to press," he says. "Give

it to me and I'll read it aloud down-stairs, your whole subscription list's down there waiting."

But we have to wait just the same until the item is set up. Then the foreman locks up the forms and bangs them on the face with his big wooden plane, and he and the old man lug them out into the pressroom while we all hold our breath — sometimes the form explodes on the way and then we don't get the *Democrat* for three days.

Pretty soon we hear the rattle-te-bang-te-clank-te-clicketty-clang of the old press, and in five minutes more Editor Ayers comes out with an armful of folded papers all fragrant with fresh black ink.

"She's out, boys," he says. Then we grab copies and hurry to spread the news of the birth of another *Democrat.* We open the sheet and look carefully down the page where old man Ayers generally conceals his local news. For a minute or

"She's out, boys," he says. *Page* 148.

two there is silence. Then somebody crams his paper into his pocket. "Hmph, nothing in it," he says, and starts home.

He's right, too. Outside of the fact that it has another week of old man Ayers's laborious and worried life in it, it is mighty bare. There isn't enough news in it to cause a thrill in a sewing circle. But after supper at home, when we look it over more carefully and the first hot flush of anticipation has worn off, we do find a lot of information. We find that Miss Ollie Mingle has gone to Paynesville for a two days' visit (aha, that Paynesville young man's folks are going to look her over), and that Mrs. Ackley is visiting her daughter in Ogallala, Neb. (Unless Ackley straightens up, we don't expect her back.) Wimble Horn is erecting a new porch and painting his house. (He must have beaten the bucket shop for once.) We also find that Jedson Bane's peaches are ripe and of the best quality,

which fact he has just proven to the editor's entire satisfaction. And that old Mrs. Gastit is feeling very poorly, and Pete Parson, while working on his automobile the other night, contributed a forefinger to the cause of gasoline by poking around in the cogs while the engine was running.

All of this is news and interesting to us; so is the fact that Miss Ri Hawkes is not teaching in the Snyder district school this week, because of a sore toe. While this item does not jar the country quite so extensively as it would if Miss Hawkes belonged to one of your leading New York families, and was employing an eleven-thousand-dollar physician to treat her for gout, it is just as important to Miss Hawkes. And there you have the great keynote of our Homeburg journalism. In the eyes of the *Democrat* we are all equal.

There are not many of us Homeburgers. We will never see twenty-five hundred

again, for as families grow smaller, most of the Illinois towns like Homeburg are contracting slowly in size even while prosperous. The *Democrat* hasn't above seven hundred subscribers, but every one of those subscribers gets his name in the paper at least once a year, even if it is only a general mention of his patriotism when he pays his annual subscription. No baby born in Homeburg is too humble to get its exact weight heralded to the world through the *Democrat*. Mrs. Maloney's pneumonia and Banker Payley's quinsy grieve the town in the same paragraph under the heading "Among our sick." The Widow Swanson's ten-mile trip down the line to a neighboring town gets as careful attention as Mrs. Singer's annual pilgrimage to California. In the matter of news we are a pure democracy. The man who buys a new automobile gets no more space than the member of Patrick McQuinn's section crew who scores a clean

scoop by digging his potatoes one week ahead of the town. And when the humblest of us lies down in death he does it with the serene consciousness that he will get half a column, anyway, with more if his disease is rare and interesting, and that at the end of the article the city will sympathize with the family in its bereavement. When Mrs. Agnew died of her broken hip she got a column, though she had been financially unable to take the paper for years, while in the same issue Jay Gould got a two-inch obituary in its boiler plate inside.

Your big papers pride themselves on their brevity, except in murder cases, and I understand that almost every New York editor thinks he could boil the story of the Creation down into less than the six hundred words which the Bible wasted on it. But Editor Ayers could give all your editors instructions in this kind of economy. If the Creation had happened

around Homeburg while he was on the job, he would have called attention to it the next week about as follows:

"We understand there was a creation in these parts during the last week. We did not learn the particulars but those who were on the ground at the time say that it was a successful affair, and that the new world is doing as well as could be expected under the circumstances."

Ayers would write it this way for two reasons. In the first place he hates to write more than one paragraph. Coming after a hard day's work collecting bills and chasing subscribers, it is a wearing effort. Nothing gets much space in the *Democrat* except obituaries and marriages, and they are all contributed — the former by the relatives and the latter by the minister. In the second place, there wouldn't be any use of wasting a lot of space on a big item because by the time the *Democrat* comes out, everybody knows all about

it, and the mere facts would be stale and unimportant beside the superstructure of soaring fancy which has been built up by the easy-running imaginations of our chief news dispensers on the street corners. And so, when the creamery burns down or the evening fast freight runs through an accommodation on the crossing, the old man puts his duty off until the last minute and then writes a few well-chosen lines merely to let us know that he is on the job and lets no news escape him. When you are running a weekly paper, your competitors in the news business are the talkers in the town who mingle seven days a week and issue a hundred thrilling extras to their fellow citizens before your press day comes around.

Besides, as I have said, old man Ayers can't afford to waste much time chasing news. He has to get a living for himself as well as for the *Democrat*, and keeping both his family and the paper alive is a dis-

tinct feat performed weekly. His pay-roll for a foreman and two girls must amount to over fifteen dollars a week, and that means cold solid cash which must be wrung from a reluctant public. Seems to me I never go into a store that I don't see old man Ayers trying to collect a little cash on an advertising account or wheedling a subscriber into coming out of the misty past and creeping cautiously down a few years toward the present on his subscription account. If there is anything which we can't do without and for which we positively object to paying real money, it is our home newspaper. Sim Bone has a roaring shoe business and pays cash for his automobiles, but he has often told me that paying good paper money for advertising would be as wasteful as eating it. He carries an ad in the *Democrat* all the year and changes it about every six months. It's July now, and he is still advertising bargains in overshoes — but he won't pay

any money. Ayers has to trade the account out, as he has to do with every other advertiser in the town.

People pity the poor ministers' families who have to live on the scrambled proceeds of donation parties, but an editor's family in our parts has even harder luck. I have seen Ayers order two suits of clothes from a clothier who owed him a big bill and was getting wabbly, and then pass by the meat market empty-handed, because his advertising account there was traded out. He told me once that he has taken disk-plows, flaxseed, magazines, encyclopedias and a new back porch in trade for advertising and subscriptions, but that he has been wearing an obsolete pair of spectacles, to his great discomfort, for ten years, because our local jeweler will not advertise. The doctors in town carry cards in the paper and owe him large amounts because his family is too healthy to catch up with them; but it will be two years before either

of our local dentists accumulates a big enough bill to allow Mrs. Ayers to have some very necessary construction and betterment work, as the railroad folks say, done to her teeth.

If it weren't for the patent medicine ads, Ayers tells me, he wouldn't be able to keep afloat for want of ready cash. He says a patent medicine may be an abomination before the Lord, but that a patent medicine advertising agent looks to him like a very present help in time of trouble. The agent comes in and beats him down until he agrees to publish several hundred yards of notices next to pure reading matter on all sides for fifteen dollars. But the fifteen dollars is cash — he doesn't have to take the stuff in trade. And so we are forever running into such thrilling headlines as, "Horrible Wreck," "Her escape was simply marvelous," "Worse than the Titanic Disaster," in the *Democrat's* local page. And then we exclaim:

"Hurray! Real news at last," and prowl eagerly down the items only to find that the horrible wreck was a citizen of Swamp Hollow upon whom a wonderful cure was effected; that "Her escape" was from inflammatory rheumatism by the aid of Gettem's Dead Shot Specific, and that the Titanic Disaster is eclipsed annually by the sad ends of thousands of people who neglect to take Palaver's Punk Pills. It always makes us mad, but we can't kick. If it weren't for the patent medicine people, we would have to pay for the *Democrat* all by ourselves.

They say that when Editor Ayers first came to Homeburg some forty years ago he was a bright young man with a great rush of words from the pen, and that he had a dapper air and was generally admired. The *Democrat* contained about a page of solid editorial opinion each week on everything, from the tariff to the duty of Russia, in whatever crisis was then

pending, and people swore by the paper and didn't make up their opinions until they had read it. But times have changed. We don't stand in awe of the *Democrat* any more. Most of us laugh at it, even those of us who are not financiers enough to keep our subscriptions called up. We call it the "Weekly Gimlet" and the "Poorly Democrat," and we make bright remarks to old man Ayers when he asks us for news and tell him that he ought to turn the paper inside out so that we can read the boiler plate first and not have to wade through his stuff. But he doesn't object. Time and toil and the worry of keeping cash enough on hand to pay the expressman who dumps his ready prints on the floor each Wednesday and refuses to budge until he has collected $3.24 have taken the pepper out of him. He doesn't write editorials any more except on the week following a national election, and they are affairs of duty which always be-

gin: "Another election has come and gone and the party of Jackson — "

He has made a living for forty years and has sent two sons through college from the *Democrat*, and the effort has taken the fight out of him. I never saw him resent a joke but once. That was when Pelty Amthorne told him that his wife considered the *Democrat* to be the best paper she had ever seen. He let Ayers burst a couple of buttons from his vest in his swelling pride before he explained that the *Democrat*, when cut in two, exactly fitted his wife's pantry shelves, and that she didn't have to trim it a bit. The old man turned on his heel without a word and that week he kindled his old-time fires and wrote the following for the local page:

A citizen of Homeburg who hasn't done anything more exciting for twenty years than stand off his grocery bill poked fun

at the *Democrat* last week to our face because there wasn't any more news in it. News, say we — News in Homeburg? News in a town where an ice-cream social is a sensation and a dog fight suspends business for three hours? News in a town where it takes a couple five years to work up a wedding and seven kinds of wedding cake is the only news in it? Where the city marshal hasn't made an arrest for two years because no one has done anything after nine P. M. except snore, and where they have to put up the lamps in pairs to keep them from getting lonesome? We don't print news from Homeburg because there isn't any, and the old rooster who joshed us knows it. He's sore because we can't make half a column out of his trip to Paynesville eight miles away last summer, but we'll promise to do better. We'll dump the paste pot in the fire, throw the old shears out of the window and get out a regular screamer of a *Democrat* some week; a paper with red ink on it and big headlines and a real piece of news in it. We will when this gabby old fossil does

his part. When he pays his six years' subscription, we'll write two columns about it. And even then no one will believe it.

Lafe Simpson, who runs the *Argus*, is a younger man than Ayers and more ambitious. Oh, yes, we have two papers. In a town the size of Homeburg you simply have to have two papers, because half of the people are always mad at one paper. The *Argus* and *Democrat* trade subscription lists about every seven years — not counting the hard-shell Democrats and blown-in-the-bottle Republicans who have to stand by their papers whether they get mad at them or not. I've been taking the *Democrat* for about five years because Simpson got too busy in the school election one year to suit me. It's pretty hard on me, because Simpson runs a better paper; but my neighbor, Sim Askinson, likes the *Democrat* better and can't take it because he took his whole

family to Chicago one week, and Ayers overlooked the fact. So he borrows my *Democrat* every week and I get his *Argus*, and thus both of us preserve our mad and our dignity and get what we want just the same.

If there's anything keener than the competition between two weekly newspapers in a small town, I'd like to see it — but not feel it. It's a searching sort of competition which seems to work its way into every detail of the town's affairs. We town people are judged by our editors according to our patronage. If a man gives two jobs of letterheads in succession to the *Argus*, Ayers looks on him as a man who has stabbed him in the back and has twisted the sword. If the Board of Education spends $67 for commencement invitations with the *Democrat* one year and $69.50 with the *Argus* the next, things aren't exactly calm and peaceable again until the discrimination has been explained. When

twins come to a man who has always taken the *Argus* in preference to the *Democrat*, old man Ayers wags his head as if to say, "He brought it on himself;" and when Lafe Simpson meets a man who persistently refuses to take his paper in preference to the sheet across the street, he greets him as formally and warily as if he had smallpox and was passing free samples around.

Lafe claims to have more circulation than the *Democrat*, and this comes nearer giving Ayers apoplexy than anything else. He claims that Lafe's circulation consists two thirds of wind and that he hasn't more than 750 bona fide subscribers, including deadhead copies to patent medicine houses. Lafe, on the other hand, says Ayers prints 750 papers merely from force of habit — that most of his subscribers have been trying to stop the paper for years and can't. Lafe says that when a man puts his name on Ayers's subscrip-

tion list, he might as well carve it in stone and then try to wipe it off with gasoline. Ayers says, in return, that when a stranger arrives to make his home in Homeburg, Lafe Simpson meets him at the train, takes him to his new residence, and hangs around the doorstep until the stranger subscribes for the *Argus* in order to improve the atmosphere around the neighborhood.

Of course the two papers are always on opposite political sides — no matter whether it is a school or national election. Makes us scheme a good deal at times to keep one of them quiet on some public project so that the other will not jump on it. We had a big time, when the plan to pave Main Street was going through, to keep Lafe from jumping in and shouting for it. That would have set Ayers off dead against it, and we had to muzzle Lafe until Ayers had committed himself.

The struggles of the two editors to outdo

each other have been titanic. When Simpson put in a steam engine, Ayers mortgaged his plant and got one of the new gasoline engines just then being introduced into an unhappy world. He never used it much unless he had lots of time in which to start it, but it was a great comfort and held Simpson level. When Simpson bought the building in which the *Argus* is printed, it nearly killed Ayers, who couldn't have bought the sign on his building. But he finally prevailed on the owner to put in a new front and name his block "The Democrat Building." But about that time Simpson, who is a go-ahead young chap, bought a young automobile in the last stage of lung trouble, and Ayers has never really recovered from that blow.

The two papers go to press on the same day, and the rivalry is intense. Early in the day the two foremen each visit the rival plants, ostensibly to borrow some type and a little gasoline, but in reality

to count the advertisements and to see how late the rival sheet is going to be. All afternoon the forces work feverishly, reports drifting in occasionally to the effect that over in the other shop they are locking up the forms. The minute the press turns in the *Democrat* office, Ayers grabs the first paper, folds it and saunters hastily over toward the *Argus*. Sometimes he meets Simpson half way over with a copy of the *Argus* in his pocket, and sometimes he gets clear over and has a chance to swell around for a minute with his new-born paper in plain sight, watching the mad foreman lock up the forms. The first paper into the post-office gets distributed first, while the subscribers of the other paper hang around in a state of frenzy and waver in their allegiance in a manner to make the stoutest heart quail. And one of the weekly diversions in Homeburg is watching this race. If it isn't too late in starting, we hang around and make

mild bets on the result. One week old man Ayers and his foreman will hurry out from the *Democrat* office and trot hastily over to the post-office carrying the week's issue of the paper between them in a wash basket. And the next week Simpson and the office devil will beat them to it. Now and then they will both appear at the same time and race side by side, bareheaded, coatless, breathless, and full of hate. I hear a good deal about the exertions to which your papers go to be on the street first with extras, but I'll bet there has never been more voltage in the competition here than there was in Homeburg the night old man Ayers and young Simpson arrived at the post-office door at precisely the same second and got their baskets and themselves in a hopeless jam. Postmaster Flint had to appoint a peace conference to settle the dispute.

Ayers is getting pretty old, and for several years we have been worrying about

his future. Since a cruel Government has decided that a newspaper publisher must keep his subscription list paid up or go out of business, times have been pretty hard for Ayers; formerly he could let a subscription account run for ten years and then take a second-hand buggy or a quarter of beef, or a few odd size grindstones on account; but of late he has had to dun us every year, and of course that makes us mad, and we quit his paper with great frequency and vim. I don't know what would have happened to the old man if Wilson hadn't been elected. But that, of course, has settled things for him. He will be our next postmaster. Every one has conceded that except Pash Wade, Emery Billings, Colonel Ackley, and Sim Askinson, who are also candidates. However, old man Ayers's petition is as long as all the rest put together, and when he is appointed and begins to draw down fifteen hundred dollars a year for handing

out his own paper to his subscribers, we will sigh with relief, and Simpson's yells will be sweet music in our ears.

If I had my way, I would put a clause in the Constitution giving all third-class postmasterships to third-class editors, anyway. It's the only chance they have of accumulating enough of a surplus to be able to go into a store with their hats on one side and buy things like other people.

VIII

THE HOMEBURG MARINE BAND

Where Music is Cherished for its own Sweet Sake Regardless of Dividends

WHERE you New Yorkers get farthest ahead of us Homeburgers, Jim, is the fact that you can go out and soak yourself in real, soul-hoisting music whenever you feel like it — provided, of course, that you have the price and that some speculator hasn't cornered the tickets, and that you can get home at night in time to get dressed in time to go back to town, and that you have sufficient nerve and endurance to go four rounds with your celebrated subway in the same twenty-four hours.

You can't realize what having music

constantly on tap means to a pilgrim from a town where two concerts in a winter is a gorge, and where about the only regular musical diversion is going to church on Sunday morning and betting on where the veteran soprano in the choir is going to hang on to the key or skid on the high turns. You laugh at me because I can't eat down-town unless I am encouraged by a bull fiddle, and because I gulp at free concert tickets like a young robin swallowing worms. But if most of your life had been spent listening to Mrs. Sim Estabrook jumping for middle C about as successfully as a dog jumps for a squirrel in a hickory tree, you'd splash around in melody, too, while you had the chance.

Of course, I don't mean to say that the music canneries don't do as big a business out our way as they do anywhere. I'll bet they ship as much as ten barrels of assorted masterpieces a month into Homeburg for our graphophone cranks; and

last winter Wimble Horn broke the piano-player record by tramping out Tannhäuser in seven minutes flat. But while these things educate us and enable us to roll our eyes in the right place in a Wagner number, they don't satisfy the soul any more than souvenir cards from Europe take away a thirst for travel. We want the real thing, and year in and out we're music-hungry. We drive our young folks to the piano and listen to them heroically until they get good, and then they go away to the city where the gate receipts are better and leave us at Lutie Briggs's mercy again. Time and time again the only thing that has stood between Homeburg and a ghastly musical silence has been the Homeburg Marine Band.

That's right! Laugh, darn you! What if Homeburg is twenty miles from the nearest creek? Our band is a lot nearer salt water than your Café de Paris is to France. And, besides, there are only

three names for a country band, anyway. If it isn't the Marine Band, it has to be the Military Band, or the Silver Cornet Band. Chet Frazier, who is our village cut-up, says that they named ours the Marine Band years ago, after it had waded out to the cemetery on a wet Memorial Day through our celebrated bottomless roads.

You can't realize what a comfort and pride a band is in a Class X town, unless you have grown up in one. They say this isn't a musical country, but its intentions are certainly good as far as brass bands go. Long before an American town is big enough to have a post-office, its citizens have either organized a brass band or are trying to get another man to move in to complete a quorum. Life never gets so complicated out on the grain elevator circuit that the station agent, school principal, and the two rival blacksmiths, and the city marshal can't lug

their horns down-town once a week in the evening and soar sweetly off into melody at band practice — that is, if they can get off on the same beat during the evening.

I can hear our home band now — up over McMuggins' Drug Store on a summer evening. It's hot — not hot enough to ignite the woodwork, but plenty warm enough to fry eggs on the sidewalks — and the whole town is out on the porches and lawns chasing a breeze, except the band. It is up in the super-heated lodge room of the Modern Woodmen, huddled around two oil lamps, because the less light it has the less heat will be generated, and it is getting ready to practice the "Washington Post March" for the Fourth of July parade. Our band has practiced the "Washington Post March" for over twenty years, but while the band has altered greatly, the grand old piece shows no sign of wear and is as fresh and unconquerable as ever.

Querulous, complaining sounds come from the lodge room. The tenor horns are crooning, and the bass horn blatting gently, while the clarionet players are chasing each other up and down the scale, like squirrels running round and round in a cage. The warming-up exercises are on. They will continue until Frank Sundell shaves his last customer and gets up to the hall with his trombone. You can tell when he comes. He pulls the slide in and out a couple of times with an unearthly chromatic grunt, and then there is a deep, pregnant silence. They are going to begin.

Usually they begin several times. It is as hard to get a band off together in practice as it is to send a dozen horses from the wire. But finally the bass catches up with the cornets, and the others sprint or put on the brakes, and they land on the fourth or fifth beat together.

For a few minutes it's great. They go over the first four bars in a bunch, and

old Dobbs gets the half note and change of key in the bass, which usually floors him, like a professional. It is a proud and happy moment for the leader. But it doesn't last. It's too good to be true. Ad Smith strikes a falsetto with his cornet and stops for wind; this rattles his partner, who can't carry the air alone to save him. Dobbs sits down on the wrong key in the bass. The tenors weaken, discouraged by the cornet, and everybody hesitates. A couple of clarionets lose the place and get to wandering around at random, creating terrible havoc. The altos stop, being in doubt. Ad recovers and launches out with terrific vim half a beat behind. There is a rally, but it is too late. You can hear fragments of five different keys, and presently every one stops except Mahlon Brown, who plays the bass drum and always bangs away through fire or water until some one turns him off.

Then there is silence — a good deal of

it. We all know what is happening. Sim Askinson, the leader, is making a few well-chosen remarks, and each player is turning around in his chair and going over the faults of his neighbor in the most kindly and thorough fashion. Ed Smith empties out his baritone horn and takes a little practice run, and then they commence to begin — or begin to start — or start to commence — whatever it is, all over again. But when they stop at ten o'clock, they haven't played the "Washington Post March" clear through in any one heat.

Doesn't sound encouraging for the Fourth, does it? But, pshaw, that's only practice! When the big day comes and the boys put on their caps and coats and such trousers as will come nearest to blending with the said coats and march down the street, do they falter and blow up in the back stretch? Not much. They canter through that air as if they had been born whistling it. There's a wonderful

inspiration in marching to a band man — give him a horn, a ragged slip of music, and about four miles of road, and he will prance down the street, climbing over ruts, wading through mud, reading at night by the light of a torch carried by a boy who is twenty feet away fighting with another boy; and he will blow his immortal soul into his horn for hours at a stretch without missing a note.

Part of the reason for the difference at home is because we always carry a few amateurs, who are privileged to come in at practice and do all the damage they can, but who have to keep mighty quiet on the march. They can carry their horns, puff out their cheeks and look as grand as they please, but if they'd presume to cut loose with some real notes and smear up a piece, they'd be fired in no time.

We have always been mighty proud of our Homeburg band. Nobody knows how old it is. We think it arrived with the

first inhabitants. These are all dead, but some of the original horns are still doing duty, and the brass on them is worn thin and almost bright. Our band is much better than the average band. That's one of the great Homeburg comforts. Whenever we get blue about the muddy streets and the small stores, and the great need of a sewage system, and the disgraceful condition of the stove in the Q. B. & C. Depot, we think of our band and are comforted. It has at least twenty members right along, most of whom can play their instruments, and Sim Askinson, who is a professional music teacher, has conducted it off and on for twenty-five years. Citizens from other towns get mighty jealous when they come down to Homeburg Thursday evenings during the summer and listen to the magnificent concerts which our band gives. I've seen as many as three hundred rigs around the public square those nights. And when our band prac-

tices up on "Poet and Peasant," which is its star piece, and goes off to the big band contests which break loose in the summer and create great havoc, large numbers of our citizens go along and bet their good money in a manner which keeps the town poor for months afterward.

I don't know anything more magnificent than the way our band plays "Poet and Peasant" with Sim Askinson leading, Ad Smith and Henry Aultmeyer duetting perfectly for once with their cornets, and the clarionet section eating up the fast parts in a manner that sends goose flesh up and down your spine. We're head and shoulders above any other band that enters the contests, but that's the trouble. The judges are never educated up to "Poet and Peasant." They always give the prize to the Paynesville Military Band, which has a five-foot painted bass drum and has to play "Over the Waves" for a concert piece, because they haven't got

a decent cornet player in town. Sometime they will get a real musician to judge these contests, and then we will win by seventeen toots.

You may not believe it, Jim, but I am an alumnus of the Homeburg band. Didn't suspect that I was anything but an ordinary citizen, did you? But it's a fact. I am a band man. I'm too modest to brag about it, but I was carrying a horn and had a uniform before I was eighteen. I suppose there is nothing, not even the fire department, that fills a small town boy with such wild ambition as a band. When I was twelve, I used to watch that band in its more sublime passages, feeling that if I ever could become great enough to play in it, others could run the country and win its great battles with no jealousy from me. The snare drummer at that time was a boy of sixteen. Of course, being snare drummer in the band, he didn't mix around much with the common

kids, and I didn't know him. But I watched him until my ribs swelled out and cracked with envy; and I used to wonder how fortune ever happened to reach down and yank that particular boy so far up into the rarefied upper regions of glory.

When I was fourteen, I went after his job. But I never could learn to play the snare drum. You have to learn to "roll," and I couldn't make my left hand behave. I tried a year and would probably be trying yet but for the fact that when Ed Norton left town, he traded me his ruinous old alto horn for three dollars and a dog. There was about as much music left in it as there is in a fish horn, but I was as delighted as if it had been a pipe organ, and when the folks wouldn't let me practice at home on it, I took it out in the country and kept it in Smily Garrett's barn. After a while I learned how to fit my face into the mouthpiece in just

the right way, and as the sounds I made became more human, I sort of edged into town, until finally I was practicing in our own barn. And the next year Askinson let me come into the band and "pad" as second alto during the less important engagements.

I played with the band for five years, and while I never got out of the "thump section," which was what the trombonists and snare drummers and the other aristocrats of the band call the altos, I had all the fun and adventures that a high-priced musician could have had, and was perfectly happy. I can still remember with pride the deep-green looks on the faces of Pete Amthorne and Billy Madigan and Snoozer Ackley, as they watched me marching grandly down the street lugging my precious old three bushels of brass in my arms, and "ump-umping" until my eyes stuck out of my head. Of course they didn't know that most of the time

I was watching a change in my notes half a bar away and wondering if I could make it without falling all over the treble clef. I looked like Sousa to them, and when I leaned grandly back in my chair at the band concerts and borrowed a page of music from my neighbor — said page being mostly Hebrew to me — I felt like a Senator or Chief Justice letting the common herd have a look at him.

I pity the poor city boys who have to grow up nowadays and depend on taxicabs and vaudeville for their excitement. Belonging to the band was more fun than belonging to the baseball team or the torchlight brigade or anything else. We got in on everything. They couldn't pull off a rally or celebration, or even a really successful church social, without us. I might say that the importance of a Homeburg citizen in the old days was determined by whether or not the Homeburg Band escorted him to his tomb. When

great doings occurred in the neighboring towns, plain citizens dug down in their pockets for car-fare, and then dug painfully down once more for our car-fare. When an ordinary Homeburger wanted to help boost McKinley to victory by parading in some distant town with a torch, it cost him five dollars and a suit of clothes. But we not only went free, but got two dollars apiece for plowing a wide furrow of glory down the streets between rows of admiring eyes.

Those two dollars counted a lot in those days, too. It looked like an easy income to us. All we had to do to earn it was to beg off from our employers for half a day, travel thirty miles or so by train, usually standing up and protecting our horns from the careless mob, march eight or ten miles over unknown streets, picking out dry places underfoot and notes from a piece of music bobbing up and down in the shadows above our horns, and then

drive home across country after midnight, getting home in time to go to work in the morning. Why, it was just like finding money; I've never had so much fun earning it since. I started once to figure out how many miles our band marched during the first Bryan campaign, but I gave it up. We never felt it at that time, but it made me so tired counting that I quit with a distinct footsore feeling.

The most worrisome task about a Homeburg band was keeping it alive. I suppose all small town bands have the same trials. We worked against incredible difficulties. If city people had the same devotion to music which we displayed, you would have a ten-thousand-piece philharmonic orchestra in New York playing twenty-four hours a day for glory. We were always building up our band with infinite pains, only to have Fate jerk the gizzard out of it just as perfection was in sight. Talent was scarce, and the rude,

heartless city was forever reaching down into Homeburg and yanking some indispensable players away. Of course there was always a waiting list of youngsters who would coax a few hoarse toots out of the alto horn, and we always had a bunch of kid clarionetists who would sail along grandly through the soft parts and then blow goose notes whenever they hit the solo part. But try as we would, we could never get more than two cornets. One of these was Ad Smith. He was a bum cornetist, but his brother Ed was a good baritone, and we had to have both or none. The other was usually some anxious young student who got along pretty well on plain work, but who would come down the chromatic run in the "Chicago Tribune March" like a fat man falling down the cellar stairs with an oleander plant.

As for trombones, there was a positive fatality among them; we were always losing them. Trombone players have to

be born, anyway, and there was no hope of developing one. Besides, the neighbors wouldn't allow it. Young Henry Wood showed promise once, but after his father had listened to him for about six months, he took the slip end of his horn away from him and beat carpets with it, until it was extinct as far as melody was concerned.

For a year we had Mason Peters, who was a wonder on the slide trombone. But he was only getting twelve dollars a week in Snyder's Shoe Emporium, and Paynesville, which never tired of putting up dirty tricks on us, hustled around and got him an eighteen dollar job up there — after which they came down to Homeburg at the first opportunity with their band to parade Peters before our eyes. It would have been a grand success if they hadn't put Peters in the front row. He lived for his art, Peters did, paying no attention to anything but his trombone, and besides he was quite deaf. He got con-

fused about the line of march, and when the band swung around the public square he kept right on up Main Street all alone, playing in magnificent form and solitary grandeur while the band swung off the other way. The whole town followed him with tears of joy, and he traveled two blocks before he became aware of the vast and appalling silence behind him; then he kept right on for the city limits on the run. It was a great comfort to us, and by the time we had gotten through apologizing to the Paynesville boys for following Peters under the impression that he was the real band, they had offered to fight us singly or in platoons.

We used to watch every new citizen like Russian detectives, only we searched them for horns instead of dynamite. Several times a trombonist came to town, and music revived noticeably. But none of them lasted. Trombonists seem to be temperamental, and when they are not

changing jobs they are resigning from the band because they are not allowed to play enough solos. Our greatest bonanza was a quiet chap named Williams, who came to town to work in the moulding room of the plow factory. After he had been there a week, we discovered that he had a saxophone. No one had ever heard or eaten a saxophone, but we looked it up, and when we found out what it was, we made a rush for him. At the next practice he appeared with a bright silver instrument covered with two bushels of keys and played a solo which sounded like three clarionets with the croup. We wept for joy and elected him leader on the spot.

This caused Sim Askinson to resign, of course, and he took Ad and Ed Smith with him, and they remained in dignified and awful silence for two years. But we didn't care. One saxophone was worth five baritones, and while Williams was

in town, we were an object of envy to all of the other bands around. We changed our name to the Homeburg Saxophone Band, and the way we rubbed it into Paynesville was pitiful. He was a little fellow, Williams was, and short of wind, which caused him to gasp a good deal during the variation parts. But he was willing. There was no shirk about him. After a year our program usually consisted of eleven saxophone solos and some other piece which could be done almost entirely on the saxophone, and the jealous Paynesvillains used to ask why we used nineteen men to play the rests when one man could have produced as much silence at far less expense.

Those were glorious years; but of course they didn't last. Williams got to resigning at the foundry just for the pleasure of having us come down and plead with the proprietor to raise his pay. Finally he resigned so much that the proprietor

fired him, and then we had to take our caps in hand and wheedle the Smiths and Askinson back into the band. I haven't belonged for years, but they are still there. When I drop in at practice, as many of the alumni do, Askinson greets me cordially and takes some young cub's horn away from him, so I can sit in. It is just like old times, especially when Ed Smith lays down his horn after a slight altercation with some one and goes home never to come back — just as he has done for the last thirty years.

That's the worst of music. One's art, you know, has so much influence over one's temper. To see our band soaring majestically down Main Street and playing "Canton Halifax" in one great throbbing rough-house of melody you would never believe that anything but brotherly love existed between the players. As a matter of fact, we never wasted any harmony among ourselves. We didn't have

any to spare. It took all we had to produce the music. For twenty-five years the Smiths and Cooney Simpson, who plays first clarionet, have been at swords' points, each with a faction behind him. Cooney says it's a shame that a good band must limp along with a cornetist who always takes three strikes to hit a high note, and Ed Smith says Cooney wants to be leader and will not be satisfied until he can play the solo and bass parts at once on his clarionet. I can see Ed Smith now, after the band has run aground in practice, taking his horn down and glaring around at Cooney.

"What you gobstick players need is a time-table," says he, "instead of notes. Come in on the A about eight-fifteen. If you can do that well, we'll try to struggle along."

"Don't get forte," Cooney replies cheerfully. "If you'd try to follow both those cornets instead of rambling along by yourself, you'd split, sure."

"Better play cornet, too, Cooney," says Ad Smith, whirling around. "You've got enough mouth for both."

"Well, we ought to have a cornetist," says Cooney, "it's what we've needed for years."

This riles the scrub cornet player, whoever he happens to be, and he gets up excitedly. "We'd get along a lot better without one or two human calliopes — " he begins.

"Set down, set down," says old Dobbs from the coils of his tuba. "Let 'em fight. They know it all between pieces — "

"Who asked you to horn in?" says Ed Smith, getting up preparatory to going home with his baritone horn and leaving a broken and forlorn world to grieve his loss.

Of course this is a crisis. But we never bust up. The Paynesville Band busts up about twice a year over the division of profits and the color of their new uniforms

and the old question of whether the cornets or trombones shall march in front. But we never go entirely to pieces. This is largely because of Sam Green. He is our peacemaker and most faithful player. He has played second alto in the band for thirty-five years without a promotion, and is by all odds the worst player I ever saw, being only entirely at home in the key of C; and he can't play three-four time to save his soul. But his devotion is marvelous. He is always the first man down to practice. He lights the lamps, builds the fires, and when necessary goes out to Ed Smith's home and persuades him to come back into the band for just this night. And whenever the dispute between the factions gets to the point where Ed Smith begins gathering up his doll things, Sam interferes.

"Come on now, boys," he pleads, "we've got to get this piece worked up. You're all good players. Why, if Paynes-

ville had you fellows, she'd have a band. That was my fault that time. I'll get this here thing right sometime. I'll sit out in the trio now and you fellows take it."

And pretty soon, as he argues, Ed's proud heart softens, and he comes back with a glare at Cooney. Then Sim Askinson raps on his music rack and says: "Gentlemen and trombone players," as he has for a quarter of a century; and a minute later the band is tumbling eagerly through its piece once more, all feuds suspended in the desperate effort to come out even at the end with no surplus bars to be played by some floundering horn.

Some time during the evening, as a rule, the various sections get together on some passage and swim grandly through, every horn in perfect time, and the parts blending like Mocha and Java. All differences are forgotten, and the band breaks up with friendly words, Ed Smith and

Cooney going home together. Music has charms to soothe the savage beast, and it also has a wonderful power of taking the temper out of the grocer and the painter and the mahout of the water-work's gasoline engine.

I never stepped so high or felt so grand as I did the first time I marched out with the boys and went down the street in the back row of the band next to the drums, a member in good standing, and dodging every time I passed under a telephone wire to keep from scraping my cap off. I never expect to feel that grand again. But I have an ambition. If ever I should become so famous and successful that when I went back to Homeburg to visit my proud and happy parents and stepped off of the 4:11 train, I would find the Homeburg Marine Band there to meet me, I would know that I had made good, and I would be content. The only thing that encourages me in my ambition is

that the band didn't come down to play when I went away. Do you know, Jim, it's the funniest thing — the fellows we played out-of-town in a blaze of glory never happened to be the chaps we came down to the train to meet afterward, somehow. But I imagine we weren't the only poor guessers in the world.

IX

THE AUTO GAME IN HOMEBURG

It has Driven out Politics as a Subject of Debate

WAIT a minute, Jim. I want to look at this automobile. . . . Yes, I know it is the sixth machine I've walked around in seven blocks, but what's time to a New Yorker on Saturday afternoon? This nifty little mile-eater has an electric gear shift, and I want to ask the chauffeur how he likes it. Promised Ad Summers I would.

. . . Says it hangs a little if his voltage is low. That's what I'd be afraid of — Gee! there's a new Jacksnipe with a center searchlight. Never would do for rutty roads. How do you like the wire wheels, Jim? Bad for side strains, I should think.

Look at those foxy inset lamps. Listen to that engine purr — two cycle, I'll bet. Say, Fifth Avenue is certainly one great street! I could walk up and down here for a month. There's a new Battleax — wonder if those two speed differentials are going to work out.

All right, Jim, I'll reluctantly shut up and focus my attention on the salmon-colored cloaks and green stockings for a while. I forgot that you don't take any deep, abiding interest in automobiles. All they mean to you is something to ride in, but to me they're as interesting as a new magazine. I've spent about four days in the sales-rooms since I've been here, and when I get home I'll be the center of breathless attention until I've passed around all the information I've dug up. I could go back without any information about the new shows, or the city campaign, but if I were to come back without a bale of automobile gossip, I'd be fired

for gross incompetency from the League of Amateur Advisers at Gayley's garage.

You thought I said I didn't own a machine? I did say it and I can prove it. But do you suppose that makes any difference in Homeburg? Here the other fellow's car is his own business. But in Homeburg an automobile is every one's business. It's like the weekly newspaper, or the new minister, or the latest wedding — it's common property. Since gasoline has been domesticated we're all enthusiasts, whether we are customers or not. The man who can't talk automobile is as lonely as the chap who can't play golf at a country club. About all there is left for him to do is to hunt up Postmaster Flint and talk politics. Flint has to talk all our politics; it's what he's paid for, but it's mighty hard on him because he just bought a new machine last spring himself.

No, you guessed wrong, Jim. Auto-

mobiles aren't a curiosity in Homeburg. How many are there in New York? Say eighty thousand. One for every sixty people. Homeburg has twenty-five hundred people and one hundred machines, counting Sim Askinson's old one-lunger and Red Nolan's refined corn sheller, which he built out of the bone-yard back of Gayley's garage. That's one for every twenty-five people. Figure that out. It only gives each auto five members of the family and twenty citizens to haul around. We're about up to the limit. Of course another one hundred people could buy machines, I suppose; but that would only allow twelve and a half passengers, admirers, guests, and advisers for each car. That isn't anywhere near enough. Why, it wouldn't be worth while owning a machine! As it is, we are all busy. I've ridden in twenty new machines this year and passed my opinion on them. It has taken a good deal of my spare time. I've

thought sometimes of buying one myself, but I don't believe it would be right. If I had a car myself, I would have to neglect all the others. It wouldn't do. Besides, I like to be peculiar.

Is every one in Homeburg a millionaire? Goodness, no! Our brag is that we have less people per automobile than any other town, but then that's the ordinary brag with an Illinois small town. We're not much ahead of the others. Automobiles don't stand for riches out our way. Blamed if I know what they do represent. Mechanical ingenuity, I guess. Country town people pick up automobiles as easily as poor people do twins. And they seem to support them about as inexpensively. If you were to take a trip around Homeburg at seven A. M. on a Sunday morning, you would find about eighty-seven automobile owners out in the back yard over, under, or wrapped around their machines.

In the city you can only tell a car owner

these days by his silk socks; but in the country town the grimy hand is still the badge of the order. The automobile owner does his own work, like his wife, and on Sunday morning, instead of hustling for the golf links, he inserts himself into his overalls and spends a couple of hours trying to persuade the carbureter to use more air and less gasoline. The interest our automobile owners take in the internals of their cars is intense. That is the only thing which mars the pleasure of the professional guest, such as myself. More than once I've sat in the sun twenty miles from home while some host of mine has taken his engine down clear to the bed plate, just because he had the time to do it and wanted to see how the bearings were standing up.

I've lived in Homeburg all my life, but I haven't yet solved the mystery of how some of our citizens own machines. It's a bigger mystery than yours because our

automobile owners pay their bills, and the mortgage records don't tell us anything. There's Wilcox, the telegraph operator. He makes seventy-five dollars a month. He works nights to earn it, and he spends his days driving around the country in his runabout. He's thirty years old, and I think he invested in an auto instead of a wife.

You can get a good meal in our local restaurant for twenty-five cents, and when some painstaking plutocrat comes in and tries to spend a dollar there, he has to be removed by kindly hands in a state of fatal distension before the job is finished. A thousand dollars would buy stock, fixtures, and good will. But a thousand wouldn't buy the restaurant owner's automobile. He began with two hundred and fifty dollars' worth of rubbish and a monkey wrench four years ago, and has pottered and tinkered and traded and progressed until he now owns a last year's

model, staggering under labor-saving devices.

Our oculist, who does business in a tiny corner in a shoe-store and never overcharged any one in his life, was our pioneer automobile owner. He bought a home-made machine and a mule at the same time, and by judiciously combining the two he got a good deal of mileage out of both. He would work all morning getting the automobile down-town and all afternoon getting the mule to haul it back. He has had three machines since then, and the one he owns now is only third-hand.

For years Mrs. Strawn washed clothes for the town from morning till night, two washings a day and all garments returned intact. Her boys used to call at our house for the wash with a wheelbarrow. They come in an automobile now. She bought it. It was a hopeless invalid at the time, but they nursed it back to health, and I

hear that next spring they are going to trade it in for a new machine. . . . Why do I say machine? Because that's what an automobile is out our way. It's a machine, and we treat it as such. Most of our people couldn't take a lobster to pieces to save their lives, but you ought to see them go through the shell of an auto. Too many Americans buy portable parlors with sixty-seven coats of varnish, and are then shocked and grieved to discover when too late that said parlors have gizzards just like any other automobile and that they should have been looked after.

I said there were one hundred automobiles in Homeburg. I was mistaken. There are ninety-nine automobiles and one car. The Payleys own the car. They bought it in New York, paid six thousand dollars for it, with a chauffeur thrown in to drive them home, and they have been under his thumb ever since. He was the

only chauffeur who had ever been brought alive in captivity to Homeburg, and the whole town inspected him with the utmost care. He was the best stationary chauffeur I ever saw. He seemed to regard that car as a monument and was shocked at the idea of moving it around from place to place.

It was too high-priced a car to be touched by Sam Gayley, our local auto doc., and somehow the chauffeur never seemed to be able to keep it in running order long enough to get up to the Payley residence and take the family out. He ran around the country a good deal, however, tuning it up and trying it out, and as he was a sociable cuss, some of us always went with him. In fact, about every one rode in the Payley car that summer except the Payleys. Wert Payley used to stop me and ask if I could fix it up to take him along sometime when I went riding with his chauffeur, but I never would risk it.

Besides, it would be imposing on the boy's generosity to lug a friend along when you went riding.

The most of our machines vary from the one thousand, five hundred dollar touring car to the five hundred dollar little fellows; and since they have come, life in Homeburg is twice as interesting. They are our dissipation, our excitement, our amusement, and the focus of our town pride. The Checker Club disbanded last winter because the members got to quarreling over self-starters, and I understand that in the Women's Missionary Societies and the afternoon clubs the comparative riding qualities of the various tonneaus about the city have about driven out teething and styles as a subject of debate. For a while during the Wilson campaign, it looked as if politics was going to get a foothold in the town, but some enthusiast organized a flying squadron of automobiles to propagate Democratic gospel, and

then it was all off. Everybody rushed into the squadron, and the trips around the district became reliability runs, with a lone orator addressing the freeborn citizens upon the tariff at each stop, and said freeborn citizens discussing magnetos, springs, and tires with great earnestness and vehemence during the speech.

Business always suspends for half a day whenever a new automobile comes to town. There may be a dozen of the same make already, but that doesn't make any difference. We are experts, trained to notice the finer shades of perfection, and until we have seen each new machine put up the clay hill four miles south of town and have ridden in it over the Q. B. & C. crossing and the other places which show up bad springs, we can't fix our minds on our work. Time was when a new baby could come into Homeburg and hold the attention of the town for a week. Now a baby is lucky if its birth notice isn't crowded

out of the *Democrat* to make room for the list of new machines.

As for those of us who haven't automobiles, life is pleasant and without responsibilities. We ride in every new automobile, and, what is more, we go over it as carefully as a farmer does a new horse. We open its hood and pry into its internal economy. We crank it to test its compression — half the Homeburg men who have achieved broken wrists by the crank route haven't autos at all. We denounce the owner's judgment on oils and take his machine violently away from him in order to prove that it will pull better uphill with the spark retarded. At night, during the summer, we hurry through supper and then go out on the front porch to wait for a chance to act as ballast.

No automobile owner in the dirt roads belt will go out without a full tonneau if he can help it — makes riding easier — and this means permanent employment

during the evenings for about three hundred friends all summer long. In fact the demand for ballast is often greater than the supply. As a result, we have become hideously spoiled. I have passed up as many as six automobiles in an evening on various captious pretexts, waiting all the time for Sim Bone's car, whose tonneau is long and exactly fits my legs. Once or twice Sim has failed to come around after I have waved the rest of the procession by, and we have had to stay at home. I have spoken to him severely about this, and he is more careful now.

Because of our great interest in automobiles, vicarious or otherwise, there is no class-hatred in Homeburg. If a man were to stop by the roadside and begin to denounce the automobile as an oppressor of the pedestrian, he would in all probability be kidnaped by some acquaintance before he was half through and carried forty miles away for company's sake.

About the only Homeburg resident who doesn't ride is old Auntie Morley, who broke her leg in a bobsled sixty years ago and has had a holy horror of speed ever since.

In fact the only classes we have are the privileged class who merely ride in automobiles and the oppressed class who ride and have to pay for them, too. Lately the latter class has begun to feel itself abused and has been grumbling a little, but we overlook it. No appeal to prejudice and jealousy can move us. Of course, I don't think that an automobile owner should be expected to leave his wife at home in order to accommodate his neighbors, and there may be some just complaint when an owner is called up late at night and asked to haul friends home from a party to which he hasn't been invited. But on the whole the automobile owners are very well treated. Suppose we spectators should band together and refuse to ride in the things or talk about

them! The market would be glutted with second-hand cars in a month.

We have no trouble with the speed limit in Homeburg either. This may be due partly to our good sense, but it is mostly due to our peculiar crossings. Homeburg is paved with rich black dirt, and in order to keep the populace out of the bosom of the soil in the muddy seasons, the brick crossings are built high and solid, forming a series of impregnable "thank-ye-marms" all over the town. One of our great diversions during the tourist season is to watch the reckless strangers from some other State dash madly into town at forty miles an hour and hit the crossing at the head of Main Street. There is a crash and a scream as the occupants of the tonneau soar gracefully into the top. There is another crash and more screams at the other side of the street, and before the driver has diagnosed the case, he has hit the Exchange Street crossing,

which sticks out like the Reef of Norman's Woe. When he has landed on the other side of this crossing, he slows down and goes meekly out of town at ten miles an hour, while we saunter forth and pick up small objects of value such as wrenches, luncheon baskets, hairpins, hats, and passengers.

Last summer we picked up an oldish man who had been thrown out of an unusually jambangsome touring car. He had been traveling in the tonneau alone, and even before he met our town he had not been enjoying himself. The driver and his accomplice had not noticed their loss, and when we had brushed off and restored the old gentleman, he said "Thank God!" and went firmly over to the depot, where he took the next train for home, leaving no word behind in case his friends should return — which they did that afternoon and searched mournfully at a snail's pace for over twenty miles on both sides of our town.

Since the automobile has begun to rage in our midst, the garage is the center of our city life. The machine owners stop each day for lubricating oil and news and conversation; the non-owners stroll over to inspect the visiting cars and give advice when necessary; and the loafers have abandoned the implement store, Emerson's restaurant, and the back of McMuggins' drug store in favor of the garage, because they find about seven times as much there to talk about. The city garage can't compare with ours for adventure and news. I have spent a few hours in your most prominent car-nurseries and I haven't heard anything but profanity on the part of the owners and Broadway talk among the chauffeurs.

In the country it's different. Take a busy day at Gayley's, for instance. It usually opens about three A. M., when Gayley crawls out of bed in response to a cataract of woe over the telephone and

goes out nine miles hither or yon to haul in some foundered brother. Gayley has a soft heart and is always going out over the country at night to reason with some erring engine; but since last April first, when he traveled six miles at two A. M. in response to a call and found a toy automobile lying bottom-side up in the road, he has become suspicious and embittered, and has raised his prices.

At six A. M. Worley Gates, who farms eight miles south, comes in to catch an early train and delivers the first bulletin. The roads to the south are drying fast, but he went down the clay hill sidewise and had to go through the bottom on low. At seven, Wimble Horn and Colonel Ackley and Sim Bone drop in while waiting for breakfast. Bone thinks he'll drive to Millford, but doesn't think he can get in an hour's business and get back by noon.

This starts the first debate of the day, Colonel Ackley contending that he has

done the distance easily in an hour-ten, and Sim being frankly incredulous. Experts decide that it can be done with good roads. Colonel says he can do it in mud and can take the hills on high; says he never goes into low for anything. Bill Elwin, one of our gasless experts, reminds him of the time he couldn't get up Foster's Hill on second and was passed by three automobiles and fourteen road roaches. This is a distinct breach of etiquette on Bill's part, for he was riding with Colonel at the time and should have upheld him. The discussion is just getting good when Ackley's wife calls him home to breakfast over the 'phone, and the first tourist of the day comes in.

He has come from the west and has had heavy weather. He asks about the roads east. Gibb Ogle, our leading pessimist, hastens to inform him that very likely the roads are impassable, because the Highway Commissioners have been im-

proving them. Out our way road improvement consists of tearing the roads out with a scraper and heaping them up in the middle. It takes a road almost a year to recover from a good, thorough case of improvement.

The stranger goes on dejectedly, and about nine A. M. young Andy Link roars in with his father's car, which he has taken away from the old man and converted into a racer by the simple process of taking off the muffler and increasing the noise to one hundred miles per hour. Andy declares that there has been no rain to the northwest and that he has done sixty miles already this morning, but can't get his carbureter to working properly, as usual. By this time several owners and a dozen critics have assembled, and the morning debate on gasoline versus motor spirit takes place. It ends a tie and both sides badly winded, when Pelty Amthorne drives in, very mad. He has been over to

Paynesville and back. This is only twenty miles, but owing to the juicy and elusive condition of the roads, his rear wheels have traveled upward of two thousand miles in negotiating the distance and he has worn out two rear casings.

Right here I wish to state that Homeburg roads are not always muddy. We average three months of beautiful, smooth, resilient and joltless roads each year. The remaining nine months, however, I mention with pain. Illinois boosters say our beautiful rich black soil averages ten feet in depth, but I think this understates the case — at least our beautiful black dirt roads seem to be deeper than that in the spring. What we need in the spring in Illinois are locks and harbor lights, and the man who invents an automobile buoyant enough to float on its stomach and paddle its way swiftly to and fro on the heaving bosom of our April roads will be a public benefactor.

Pelty is justly indignant, because he had hoped to get another thousand miles of actual travel out of his tires. We sympathize with him, but in the middle of his grief Chet Frazier drives up. When he sees his ancient enemy, he climbs out of his car, comes hastily over to where Pelty is erupting, and starts trading autos with him.

Did you ever hear a couple of seasoned horse traders discussing each other's wares? Horse traders are considerate and tender of each other's feelings compared with two rural automobile owners who are talking swap with any enthusiasm.

"Hello, Pelty," says Chet. "Separator busted again?"

Everybody laughs, and Chet walks all around the machine. "Why, it ain't a separator at all," he finally says. "What is it, Pelty?"

"If you'd ever owned an automobile you'd know," grunts Amthorne, hauling

off a tire. "What's become of that tinware exhibit you used to block up traffic with?"

Chet gets the laugh this time.

"That tinware exhibit stepped over from Jenniesburg in thirty minutes flat this morning," says Chet. "Lucky you weren't on the road. I'd have thrown mud on your wind shield."

"Say!" Pelty shouts. "Your machine couldn't fall ten miles in thirty minutes. Why don't you get a real automobile? What will you give me to boot for mine?"

They are off, and business in the vicinity suspends.

"I'll trade with you, Pelty," says Chet calmly — quite calmly. "Let me look it over."

He walks carefully around the auto, opens the hood and looks in. "Funny engine, isn't it? I saw one like that at the World's Fair."

Pelty has the hood of Chet's machine

open too and is right there with the retort courteous. "Is this an engine or a steam heater?" he asks. "What pressure does she carry?"

"She never heats at all except when I run a long time on low," Chet says eagerly.

"Oh, yes," says Pelty, "I never have to go into low much —"

"Gosh!" Chet explodes. "When you go up Sanders Hill, they have to close two district schools for the noise."

"Only time you ever heard me I was hauling you up with your broken jack-shaft," snorts Pelty. "You ought to get some iron parts for your car. Cheese has gone out of style."

"You still use it for tires, I see," says Chet.

"Never mind," says Pelty wrathfully. "I get mileage out of my machine; I don't drive around town and then spend two days shoveling out carbon."

"Peculiar radiator you've got," says

Chet, changing the subject. "Oh, I see; it's a road sprinkler. What do you get from the city for laying the dust?"

"I can stop that leak in two minutes with a handful of corn meal," says Pelty, busily surveying Chet's machine. "Do you still strip a gear on this thing every time you try to back?"

"Why do you carry a horn?" asks Chet. "You're wasteful; I heard your valves chattering when I was three blocks away."

"I didn't hear yours chatter much last Tuesday on Main Street," snorts Pelty. "You cranked that thing long enough to grind it home by hand."

"Ya-a! Talk, will you?" yells Chet earnestly. "Any man who begins carrying hot water out to his machine in a tea-kettle in September knows a lot about starting cars."

"Well, get down to business," says Pelty. "You want to trade, you say.

I don't want that mess. It's an old back-number with tin springs, glass gears and about as much compression as a bandbox. Give me five hundred dollars and throw your automobile in. I need something to tie my cow to. She'd haul away anything that was movable."

"Give you five hundred dollars for that parody on a popcorn wagon?" snorts Chet. "Why, man, the poor old thing has to go into low to pull its shadow! You're delirious, Pelty. I'll tell you what I'll do. You give me a thousand dollars for my car, and I'll agree to haul that old calliope up to my barn, out of your way, and make a hen roost out of it. Come on now. It's your only chance."

Shortly after this they are parted by anxious friends, and the show is over. I've known Homeburg men to give up a trip to Chicago because Chet and Pelty began to trade their autos just before train time.

In New York an auto means comfort and pleasure and advertisement, like a fur-lined overcoat with a Persian lamb collar. But in Homeburg it means a lot more. It keeps us busy and happy and full of conversation and debate. It pulls our old, retired farmers out of their shells and makes them yell for improvements. It unbuckles our tight-wads and gives our ingenious young loafers something to do. It promotes town pride, and it keeps our money circulating so fast that every one has a chance to grasp a chunk as it goes by.

It has made us so independent of railroads that we feel now when buying a ticket to Chicago as if we were helping the poor old line out. Our Creamery has been collecting milk and shipping butter in an old roadster with a wagon bed thorax for a year. Two of our rural route mail carriers use small machines, except in wet weather, and good-roads societies in

our vicinity are the latest fad. We raised one thousand five hundred dollars last spring to bring the Cannon Ball Trail from Chicago to Kansas City through our town, and our hotel-keeper contributed one hundred dollars of it. He says we'll be on the gas-line tourist route to the coast after the trail has been marked and drained and graded up well.

But mostly the automobile means freedom to us. We're no longer citizens of Homeburg but of the congressional district. We're neighbors to towns we hadn't heard of ten years ago, and the horizon nowadays for most of us is located at the end of a ten-gallon tank of gasoline. Why, in the old days, you had to go fifty miles east and double back to get into the north part of our county, and more of us had crossed the ocean than had been to Pallsbury in the north tier of townships. Now our commercial clubs meet together alternate months, and about seventeen babies

in our town have proud grandparents up there.

That's part of what the automobile means to us, Jim. Can you blame me for being so interested in a new one? Maybe it will have some contrivance for scaring cows out of a narrow road.

X

THE HOMEBURG TELEPHONE EXCHANGE

What Would Happen if We Tried to Get Along With a City Operator

ALL right, Jim! Having now completed the task of telephoning to Murray Hill several thousand and something, I'm ready to join you at luncheon. I'm glad I telephoned. I won't have to spend the afternoon doing it now and, besides, I feel so triumphant. I got through this time without forgetting to get a nickel first. I usually go into one of those wooden overcoats and go through all the agonies of elbowing my way through half a dozen centrals into some one's ear several miles away, and then discover that I haven't anything but a half dollar.

Then I have to stop and begin all over again.

Telephoning is one of the prices you have to pay to live in a metropolis, Jim. I suppose it will always hurt me to pay a nickel for telephoning. Seems like paying for a lungful of air — and bad air at that. Coming as I do from the simple bosom of the nation, where talk over the wires is so cheap that you sometimes have to wait half an hour while two women are planning a church social over your line, I can't seem to resign myself to paying the price of a street-car ride every time I breathe a few sentiments into a telephone. Now the street cars never fail to dazzle me. They are a wonderful bargain. When we are too tired to walk in Homeburg, we have to pay at least fifty cents for a horse from the livery stable, unless some automobile is going our way. Nothing is more pleasant to me than to slip a nickel to a street-car

conductor and ride ten miles on it. But when we want to use a telephone, do we go through all this ceremony of dropping a nickel into a set of chimes? Not much. My bill at home at five cents per telephone call would be more than my income. Why, many a time I've called up as many as eight people in the west part of town to know whether the red glow in the sky was the sunset or the Rolling Mills at Paynesville burning down! And almost every day I telephone McMuggins, the druggist, to collar a small boy and send up an Eltarvia Cigar. If that call cost me five cents, I would be practically smoking ten-cent cigars, and all Homeburg would regard me with suspicion.

I suppose it will be a hundred years before we get over saying "Great invention, isn't it?" every time we have finished a satisfactory session over the telephone. But I don't think you city people realize how much of an invention it is.

Of course, the telephone is more important in New York than it is in Homeburg. If you had to go back to the old-fashioned stationary messenger boy to do your business here, a good share of the city would have to close out at a sacrifice. You do things with your telephones which dazzle us entirely, like talking into parlor cars, calling up steamships, buying a railroad and saying airily "Charge it," and tossing a few hectic words over to Pittsburgh or Cincinnati at five dollars per remark, as casually as I would stop in and ask Postmaster Flint why in thunder the Chicago papers were late again — and that is about as casual as anything I know of.

I'm willing to admit that your telephones are much more wonderful than ours, not only because of what they do for you, but because of the amount of money they can get out of you without causing revolutions and indignation meet-

ings. Why, they tell me that business firms here think nothing of paying one hundred dollars a year for a telephone! At home once, when we tried to raise the farmer lines from fifty cents to a dollar a month, we almost had to fortify the town. I take off my hat to a telephone which can collect one hundred dollars a year from its user without using thumbscrews. It must have more ways of working for you than I have ever dreamed of.

No, the telephone in Homeburg is a very ordinary thing, and we could get along without it quite nicely as far as exertion is concerned, it being only a mile from end to end of the town. But if we had to do without our telephone girls, we'd turn the whole town into a lodge of sorrow and refuse to be comforted. I know of no grander invention than the country town telephone girl. She's not only our servant and master, but she's our watch-dog, guardian, memorandum book, guide, philosopher and

family friend. When our telephone can't give us convenience enough, she supplies the lack. When brains at both ends are scarce, she dumps hers into the pot; and when the poor overworked instrument falls down on any task, she takes up the job. She not only gives our telephone a voice, but she gives it feet and hands and something to think with.

I got into a big telephone exchange once and watched it for over a minute before I was fired out. It was a very impressive sight — rows on rows of switchboards, hundreds of girls, thousands of little flashing lights, millions of clickety-clicks and not enough conversation to run a sewing circle up to refreshment time. The company was very proud of it, and I suppose it was good enough for a city — but, pshaw, it wouldn't do Homeburg for a day. If some one were to offer that entire exchange to us free of charge, we'd struggle along with it for a few hours, and then we'd rise up en masse

and trade it off for Carrie Mason, our chief operator, throwing in whatever we had to, to boot.

Our exchange is in the back room of the bank building up-stairs. You could put the entire equipment in a dray. Our switchboard is about as big as an old-fashioned china closet and has three hundred drops. I suppose an up-to-date telephone manager has forgotten what "drops" are and you can't be expected to know. But out our way the telephone companies are coöperative, and as every subscriber owns a share, we all take a deep personal interest in the construction and operation of the plant, discussing the need of a new switchboard and the advantage of cabling the Main Street lead, in technical terms.

Well, anyway, a drop is a little brass door which falls down with a clatter whenever the telephone which is hitched to that particular drop wants a connection. And

Miss Carrie Mason, our chief operator, sits on a high stool with a receiver strapped over her rick of blond hair jabbing brass plugs with long cords attached into the right holes with unerring accuracy, and a reach which would give her a tremendous advantage in any boarding-house in the land. Sometimes she has one assistant, and in rush hours she has two. But on Sunday afternoons and other quiet times she holds down the whole job alone for hours at a time; and when I go up to her citadel and ask her to jam a toll call through forty miles of barbed wire and miscellaneous junk to Taledo by sheer wrist and lung power, she entertains me as follows while I wait:

"Yes, indeed, I'll get your call through as soon as I can, but the connection's — Nmbr — awful — Nmbr — bad to-day— Nmbr — They're not at home, Mrs. Simmons; they went to Paynesville — Nmbr — I'll ring again — Nmbr — Hello, Doctor

Simms, Mrs. McCord told me to tell you to come right out to the farm; the baby's sick — Nmbr — The train's late to-day, Mrs. Bane, you've got plenty of time — Nmbr — I can't get them, Mrs. Frazier. I'll call up next door and leave word for them to call you — Nmbr (To me: "Hot to-day, isn't it? I tell 'em we ought to have an electric fan up here.") — Nmbr — ("It would keep us better tempered.") — Nmbr — Oh, Mrs. Horn, will you tell Mrs. Flint when she comes home that Mrs. Frazier wants her to call her up? — Nmbr — Now, Jimmy, you haven't waited two seconds. I know you're anxious to talk to Phoeb, but she isn't home; she's at the cooking club — Nmbr — Cambridge, do see if you can't get through to Taledo. I've a party here that's in a hurry — Nmbr. (To me: "That Taledo line's awful. It's grounded somewhere on that farmer's line west of Tacoma.") — Nmbr — Yes, Mr. Bell, I'll call you quick as he comes in his

office; I can see his door from my window — Nmbr — No, Mrs. Bane, the doctor's just gone out to the McCord farm. If you hurry, you can stop him as he goes past. He left about five minutes ago — Nmbr — Gee, Paynesville, you gave me an awful ring in the ear then! No, you can't get through, the line's busy. Well, you'll have to wait. I can't take the line away from them — Nmbr — Oh! (very softly) Hello, Sam. Oh, pretty well. I'm most melted — wait a minute — Nmbr — Hello, Sam (long silence) Oh, get out! My ear's all full of taffy — wait a minute — Nmbr — Nmbr — No, Mr. Martin, there hasn't been any one in his office all day. I think he's gone to Chicago — Hello, Sam — wait a minute, Sam — Nmbr — Nmbr — Hello, Sam — Say, I'm all alone and jumping sidewise. Call me up about six (very softly). G'by, Sam — Nmbr. Oh, Mrs. Lucey, is Mrs. Simms at your house? Tell her her husband will be home late to supper, he's gone

out in the country — Hello. Hello. *Hello*, Taledo. Is your party ready? (To me: "All right, here they are. You'll have to talk pretty loud.") Hello, Taledo. All ready — Nmbr."

That is a fair sample of Carrie. We couldn't keep house without her. And that's why I feel an awful pang of jealousy when I hear that lobster Sam talking to her. Maybe it's just the ordinary joshing which goes on over the toll lines in the off hours. But maybe it isn't. Wherever Sam is and whoever he is, he is a danger to Homeburg. Perhaps he is a lineman at Paynesville, and then again he may be a grocer in some crossroads town near by, with a toll telephone in the back of his store. But if he talks to Carrie long enough and skilfully enough, he will come up to Homeburg, marry her, and bear her away to his lair, far from our bereaved ears. We've lost several telephone girls that way, and when a telephone girl knows

all of your habits and customs and those of your friends, and can tell just where to find you or to find whomever you want found, and has the business of the town down to the smallest details stowed away in her capable head, it messes things up dreadfully to have her leave us high and dry and go to housekeeping — which any one can do.

Telephone girls are born, not made, in towns like Homeburg. We require so much more of them than city folks do. When my wife wants to know if hats are being worn at an afternoon reception, she calls up Carrie. Ten to one Carrie has caught a scrap of conversation over the line and knows. But if she hasn't, she will call up and find out. When a doctor leaves his office to make a call, he calls up Carrie, and she faithfully pursues him through town and country all day, if necessary. When we are preparing for a journey, we do not go down to

the depot until we have called up Carrie and have found out if the train is on time, and if it isn't, we ask her to call us when it is discovered by the telegraph operator. And when our babies wander away, we no longer run frantically up and down the street hunting for them. We ask Carrie to advertise for a lost child seven hands high, and wearing a four-hour-old face-wash; and within five minutes she has called up fifteen people in various parts of the town and has discovered that said child is playing Indian in some back yard a few blocks away.

Carrie is also our confidante. I hate to think of the number of things Carrie knows. Prowling into our lines while we are talking, as she does, in search of connections to take down, she overhears enough gossip to turn Homeburg into a hotbed of anarchy if she were to loose it. But she doesn't. Carrie keeps all the secrets that a thousand other women can't.

She knows what Mrs. Wimble Horn said to Mrs. Ackley over the line which made Mrs. Ackley so mad that the two haven't spoken for three years. She knows just who of our citizens telephone to Paynesville when Homeburg goes dry, and order books, shoes, eggs, and hard-boiled shirts from the saloons up there to be sent by express in a plain package. She knows who calls up Lutie Briggs every night or two from Paynesville, and young Billy Madigan would give worlds for the information, reserving only enough for a musket or some other duelling weapon. She knows how hard it is for one of our supposedly prosperous families to get credit and how long they have to talk to the grocer before he will subside for another month.

There's very little that Carrie doesn't know. I shudder to think what would happen if Carrie should get miffed and begin to divulge. Once we had a tele-

phone girl who did this. She was a pert young thing who had come to town with her family a short time before. It was a mistake to hire her — telephone girls should be watched and tested for discretion from babyhood up — but our directors did it, and because she showed a passion for literature and gum and very little for work, they fired her in three months. She left with reluctance, but she talked with enthusiasm; and Homeburg was an armed camp for a long time.

Goodness knows we have enough trouble with our telephone even with Carrie to supply discretion for the whole town. Party lines and rubber ears are the source of all our woe. You know what a party line is, of course. It's a line on which you can have a party and gab merrily back and forth for forty minutes, while some other subscriber is wildly dancing with impatience. Most of our lines have four subscribers apiece, and it's just as

hard to live in friendliness on a party line as it is for four families to get along good-naturedly in the same house.

There's Mrs. Sim Askinson, for instance. She's a good woman and her pies have produced more deep religious satisfaction at the Methodist church socials than many a sermon. But St. Peter himself couldn't live on the same telephone line with her. She's polite and refined in any other way, but when she gets on a telephone line she's a hostile monopolist. Early in the morning she grabs it and holds it fiercely against all comers, while talking with her friends about the awful time she had the night before when the cold water faucet in the kitchen began to drip. Mrs. Askinson can talk an hour on this fertile subject, stopping each minute or two to say, with the most corrosive dignity, to some poor victim who is wiggling his receiver hook: "Please get off this line, whoever you are. Haven't you any manners? I'm talking,

and I'll talk till I get through." And then, like as not, when she's through, she'll leave the receiver down so that no one else will be able to talk — thus holding the line in instant readiness when another fit of conversation comes on. Seven party lines have revolted in succession and have demanded that Mrs. Askinson be taken off and wished on to some one else, and Sim is mighty worried. His wife has lost him so many friends that he doubts if he will be able to run for the town board next year.

We're a nice, peaceable folk in Homeburg, face to face. But like every one else, we lay aside our manners when we get on the wires and push and elbow each other a good deal. Funny what a difference it makes when you are talking into a formless void to some strange human voice. I've never said: "Get out of here," to any one in my office yet, but when some one intrudes on my electric conver-

sation, even by mistake, I boil with rage and I yell with the utmost fervor and indignation: "Get off this line! Don't you know any better than to ring in?" And the other person comes right back with: "Well, you big hog, I've waited ten minutes, and I'll ring all I want!" And then I say something more, and something is said to me that eats a little semicircular spot out of the edge of my ear. It's mighty lucky neither of us knows who is talking. Suppose Carrie should tell. As I say, Carrie holds us in the hollow of her hand.

But the rubber ear is even worse than the Berkshire manners. A rubber ear is one that is always stretching itself over some telephone line to hear a conversation which doesn't concern it. For a long time we were singularly obtuse about this little point of etiquette in the country. The fact that all the bells on a line rang with every call was a constant temptation

to sit in when we weren't wanted. We listened to other people's conversations when we felt like it. It amused us, and why shouldn't we? We rented our telephone and we had a right to pick it up and soak in everything that was going through it.

When the exchange was first put in, fifteen years ago, more than one Homeburg woman used to wash her dishes with the telephone receiver strapped tightly to her ear, dropping into the conversation whenever she felt that she could contribute something of interest. As for the country lines, it was the regular thing, and nobody minded it at all. That was what killed the first line out of Homeburg. It had fourteen subscribers and every one was hitched on the same wire. For a month everything went nicely. Then old man Miller got mad at two neighbors who were sort of sizing him up over the wire, and quit speaking to them. And

Mrs. Ames was caught gossiping, and a quarrel ensued in which about half the line took part, all being on the wire and handy. Young Frank Anderson heard Barney DeWolf making an engagement with his girl and licked Barney. One thing led to another until not a subscriber would speak to another one, and the line just naturally pined away.

Etiquette has tightened up a lot since then. Still, we have rubber ears to-day, and they cause half the trouble in Homeburg. You see, the telephone has entirely driven out the back fence as a medium of gossip. It offers so much wider opportunities. Nowadays it does all the business which begins with: "Don't breathe this to a soul, but I just heard —" and half the time some uninvited listener with an ear like a graphophone horn is drinking in the details, to be published abroad later. Mrs. Cal Saunders had our worst case of gummy ear up to a couple of years

ago, and broke up two engagements by listening too much. But she doesn't do it any more. Clayt Emerson cured her.

Something had to be done for the good of the town and Clayt, who lived on the same line with her, conceived the plan of letting Mrs. Saunders hear something worth while just to keep her busy and happy. So he called up Wimble Horn and talked casually until he heard the little click which meant that Mrs. Saunders had focused her large receptive ear on the conversation. Then he told Horn that he was going to burn the darn stuff up, trade being bad, anyway. Wimble offered to help him, and for three nights they talked mysteriously about the crime, mentioning more plotters, while Mrs. Cal hung on the line with her eyes bulging out, and confided the secret to all the friends she had.

Finally on Friday night, Policeman Costello, who was in the deal, told Clayt

that the expected had happened and that Mrs. Saunders had told him about the horrible incendiary plot which was being hatched. Saturday night came, and Costello refused to go to Clayt's store unless Mrs. Saunders would come and denounce the villains, who were among our most respected citizens. So Mrs. Saunders finally agreed, in fear and trembling, and, taking a couple of her firmest friends, she led Policeman Costello down to Clayt's restaurant at midnight, and, sure enough, there was a light in the back part. Costello burst open the door, and when they all rushed down on the scene of the crime, they found Clayt and half a dozen of us manfully smoking up a box of stogies which a slick traveling man had unloaded on him. Mrs. Saunders insisted that crime was about to be committed and got so excited that she repeated Clayt's exact words — in the middle of which a great light came to her, and she said she was going home.

"I think you had better," said Clayt, "and I'll tell you something more. You listen to other people's affairs more than is good for you."

But she hasn't since.

Of course you don't have these troubles. But whenever I see New York people harboring telephones in their homes which absolutely decline to be civil until you feed them five cents, I think of our Homeburg blessings and am content. Six dollars a year buys a telephone at home, and about the only families which haven't telephones are a few widows who live frugally on nothing a year, and old Mr. Stephens, who has one hundred thousand dollars loaned out on mortgages and spends half an hour picking out the biggest eggs when he buys half a dozen. There isn't a farm within ten miles which isn't connected with the town, and while the desk 'phone is a novelty with us and we still have to grind away at a handle to get

Central, we can put just as much conversation into the transmitter and take just as much out of the receiver as if we were connected with a million telephones. Our Homeburg 'phones are old-fashioned; and the lines sound as if eleven million bees were holding indignation meetings on them, but they have made a big family out of three whole counties, and I guess they will take care of us all right — so long as Carrie holds out and we can keep that Sam fellow where he belongs.

XI

A HOMEBURG SCHOOL ELECTION

Where Woman is Allowed to Vote and Man Has To

WELL, Jim, you've taken me to see a great many wonderful sights in this municipal monstrosity of yours, but I don't believe one of them has interested me as much as this parade. I've worn three fat men on my toes for an hour to get a chance to watch it, but it was worth the agony. Think of it — at home we are doing well to get an attendance of two thousand at a fire. Here in New York are several hundred thousand people stopping their mad grabs at limousines and country houses, and blocking up the streets to watch a few

women parading in the interest of the ballot for psyche knots as well as bald heads. It's wonderful! How did the women persuade you to do it? I can't help thinking that they lost a tremendous chance for the cause. Think how much money the ladies would have made if each one had worn a sandwich board advertising some new breakfast food or velveteen tobacco! With a crowd like this reading every word, they could have charged enough to pay the expenses of a whole campaign!

It's the crowd that interested me. As far as the parade went, it wasn't so much. Half a hundred women in cloaks and staffs setting off on foot for Washington or Honolulu isn't terrifically exciting. I'd a lot rather go down the line about twenty or thirty miles and watch them come in to roost at night. There would be some inhuman interest in that. But what does all this mob mean? Have you New York-

ers gone crazy over suffrage? What! Just the novelty of the thing? Well, let me tell you then, you are goners! You may not want suffrage now, but if the women are going to choke traffic every time they spring a novelty, you're going to have to grant them suffrage just to get the chance to attend to business now and then.

Me? Of course I'm a suffragist. I'm a suffragist on twenty counts. No, thanks, I won't argue the question now, because we have to get over to the hotel for dinner in an hour or two, and there's no use starting a thing you will have to leave in the middle. I'll just tell you the last count to save time, and let it go at that. I'm a suffragist because I want the rest of mankind to have what we've had in Homeburg for the last twenty years or so. We've been through the whole thing. Whenever a man's been through anything, he naturally isn't content until he can stand by and watch some other man

get his. Understand? I'm for suffrage in aged little New York. I want you to have it and have it a plenty. And I want to watch you while you're having it. It's a grand thing when you've got used to it. It will do you good, Jim, just like medicine.

Do women vote in Homeburg? Of course they do. I'd like to see anybody stop them. I don't mean that they vote for President. That is, they won't until next time. It's only the more important elections that they take part in. Oh, I know you folks in the big town think that unless you're voting for governor or for the ringleaders of your city government, the job isn't worth while. But that's where you differ from Homeburg. We men vote for President and get a good deal of fun out of the campaign. It's a favorite masculine amusement, and the women don't interfere with us. But it's not important. I mean it's not important to Homeburg. We stand up all summer

and tear our suspender buttons off trying to persuade each other that Homeburg's future depends on who reviews the inaugural parade at Washington; but it isn't so, and we know it.

The really burning question in Homeburg is the make-up of the next school board. That is the election which paralyzes business, splits families, and sours friendships. And let me just convey to you in a few brief words, underscored with red ink, the fact that women vote in the Homeburg school elections. If you want to see real, concentrated politics with tabasco sauce trimmings, go to Homeburg or some other small town which is fond of its school system and watch the women getting out the vote.

Don't waste your time by coming the day before election. Don't even expect to see any excitement in the morning. We don't smear our school election troubles all over the almanac. We have the con-

vulsion quickly and get over it. You could stray into Homeburg on the morning of a school election and not suspect that anything was going on except, perhaps, a general funeral. Absolute quiet reigns. People are attending to business with the usual calm.

You can tell that there is an election on by the little flags stuck out a hundred feet from the engine-house doors, but that's the only way. Inside the judges sit waiting for business about as successfully as a cod fisher on the banks of the Mississippi. Now and then some one strays in and casts a vote. By noon half a dozen are in the ballot box. The nation is safe, the schools are progressing satisfactorily, the ticket is going through without a kick. Even the candidates stop standing around outside peddling their cards, go home to dinner and forget to come back.

Pretty placid, eh? You bet it is. You

know all about the calm before the storm and the little cloud the size of the man's hand which comes up about eight bells and does a general chaos business without any advance notices. Well, that cloud in our school elections is impersonated by Mrs. Delia Arbingle, and she usually arrives at the polls about three P. M. with a new ticket, twenty warlike followers, and several thousand assorted snorts of defiance.

That's when the storm breaks — and it's a whole lot bigger than a man's hand by that time. Delia is a mighty plentiful woman physically, and when she gets her war paint on, she's a regular cloudburst. As I say, about three o'clock or thereabouts, we suddenly wake up to the fact that we have a school election in our midst, and that unless we arise as true men and patriots, it will soon be at our throats. How do we find it out? Our women folks tell us. You never saw such devoted women folks, or such determined

ones, either. The minute Delia leaves her house with her marauding band in her annual attempt to get the scalp of the high school principal who whipped her oldest son seventeen years ago, the women of Homeburg *rise*. And we men go and vote.

Now, we're not enthusiastic about voting. We're not afraid of Delia. We've seen her insurge too often. But we go and vote, anyway. We go by request. You've never had your loving wife come in and request you to vote, have you, Jim? Well, you've got something coming. It's a request which you're going to grant. You may not want to, but that has nothing to do with the case. This is about the way it happens in Homeburg: I am sitting in my office. I've got a lot of work on hand, and it's no use to vote, anyway, and, to tell the truth, I had forgotten all about it. Suddenly the telephone bell rings: I answer it. Here's my cross-section of the conversation:

"Hello? Oh, hello! . . . No, I haven't voted yet. . . . Pretty busy to-day. . . . You're coming down? . . . No, I don't want to vote.—What's the use? It's the same old . . . Now, my dear, it's just the same old row. She can't get any . . . But I tell you I'm busy. You go on and . . . Yes, of course I'm an American citizen, but I don't get a salary for it. I'm trying to earn . . . Well, five minutes to cast a useless vote is . . . Oh, all right. Anything to please you. . . . No, I'll not call up Judge Hicks. He's old enough to vote by himself. . . . Oh, all right. . . . Now, look here, my dear, I can't ask Fleming to do that. His wife is a friend of Mrs. Arbingle's. . . . Yes, I can say that, but it would be a threat . . . Oh, the schools will run anyway. Now, don't get excited. . . . All right, doggone it, it'll make a regular fool of me though! . . . Good-by.

"Gosh."

I am mopping my forehead while I say that. I'm going to vote and, what is more, I'm going over to get Judge Hicks, who is a cross old man-eater, and get him to vote, and then I am going to call up Fleming, who would otherwise vote against us, and tell him that if he doesn't support our ticket, our grocery account will go elsewhere. I hate to do that like the mischief. It isn't considered ethical in national elections. But somehow we can't stop and discuss these fine points at 3.15 P. M. with our loving but excited wives. They don't seem to allow it.

I get into my coat, pretty cross, and go down-stairs. Homeburg is frantically awake. Down the street scores of patriots are marching to the polls. They are not marching in lock-step, but most of them are under guard just the same. Mrs. Chet Frazier, pale but determined, is towing Chet out of his store. Mrs. Wimble Horn is hurrying down the street with an

umbrella in one hand and Wimble in the other. From the post-office comes Postmaster Flint emitting loud wails. It is against the law to leave the post-office unoccupied, but he can thresh that out with his wife at home after he has voted. Attorney Briggs was going to Chicago this afternoon, but I notice he is coming back from the depot. Mrs. Briggs is bringing him. If I know anything about rage, Attorney Briggs is ready to masticate barbed wire. His arms are making a blue haze as they revolve. But he's coming back to vote. He can go to Chicago to-morrow, but the nation must be saved before five o'clock.

I do my errands, losing one friend at Fleming's and considerable dignity at the judge's, because the judge is an old widower and mighty outspoken. Then I hurry back and go to the polls arm in arm with my loving wife. We have to wait our turn outside the engine house. From all

corners of town the votes roll in, most of them under convoy. It's a weird mixture — the men sullen and sheepish, the women inspired and terrible. Even the candidates, most of whom are men, are embarrassed. They are peddling tickets frantically, and whenever they falter and show signs of running, their wives hiss something into their ears and brace them up again.

The two hostile forces are eying each other with horrid looks. Mrs. Arbingle is quiet but deadly. I never saw so much hostility coated over one face as there is on hers. She is in her glory. This time she is going to unmask the hosts of corruption, including those who will not call on her, cave in the school ring, boot out the incompetents, and see justice done to her son at last. Mrs. Wert Payley, who generally leads the other side, has higher ideals, of course, and isn't so red in the face. But she is hostile too. No viperess shall tread on the school system if she can

help it! She keeps her lieutenants hustling, and now and then she looks over the crowd of captive men on the enemy's side and issues a command. Then some woman talks to her husband, and he gets red and mad and wags his arms. But in the end he goes over and talks to a man on the other side. And then that conversation spreads like a prairie fire, and the men knot up into a cluster, and hard words are used, and a lot more friendships go into the back shop for repairs.

Five o'clock is coming fast. Mrs. Payley looks over her list. Young Ad Summers has refused to budge from his shop. Miss Ri Hawkes blushes a little and then goes away to a telephone. Pretty soon Ad appears. He's panting, into the bargain. He gets in line, votes, and Ri walks away with him. There is a sigh of relief from the Payley cohorts now because old man Thompson is coming. He is over ninety and hates like thunder to go out and vote,

but he can't help himself. He has lived in a wheeled chair for ten years and has to go wherever his granddaughter wheels him. He passes in, muttering.

Only five minutes more. The excitement is intense. Hurrah! Some one has gotten the telegraph operator's goat. He's coming on the run. That probably means he'll go to the next dancing-club party. Judge Hicks appears, four women around him. He is mad, but they are triumphant and they look scornfully at me, saying "chump" with their eyes. He votes. There is a commotion at the corner because Gibb Ogle has attempted in a mild way to be corrupted. He wants to know why he can't sleep in the South School basement. The women are indignant, and appoint two husbands to deal with him. Gibb votes. Bang! The polls are closed. It's all over but the counting.

We'd like to go back to work, but the suspense is too great. Not that we have

any suspense, but our wives have; and if we are worthy of the name of men, we must help them endure it, even if we ourselves are not interested in the schools. So we hang around and fume over the jungle-fingered judges who take as much time as if they were enumerating the fleas of Africa. Finally a cheer comes from the front of the crowd. The women beside us gasp anxiously. Which side cheered? Hurrah! There's Mrs. Payley waving her handkerchief. We win.

After that, we men can go. The schools have been saved by a vote of 453 to 78, but it was no thanks to us. No, indeed! If it weren't for the women where would our schools be?

We've had women's suffrage in our midst for almost twenty years, as I say, and looking back over it I can't see a single dull moment politically. From the day when an indulgent State gave them permission, our women have guarded the

schools at the ballot box. They've done a thorough and painstaking job, and I must say the schools have improved a lot. But they have sprung a lot of political ideas which have made the old-timers sit up with startled looks and scratch their heads hopelessly.

That's what you are going to find out, Jim, when woman begins to vote for herself around here and to vote you into the bargain. She isn't going to play the game according to the old rules. She has no use for them. She has her own way of going about things politically, and while it is effective, its wear and tear on mankind is terrific. When the Homeburg women first attempted to place a woman on the school board, about fifteen years ago, most of the men objected, and they decided to hold a town caucus and call the women in. There were a great many reasons why a woman shouldn't leave her home and sit around on a school board,

and they felt sure that if they were to talk it over frankly in meeting they could show them these reasons. And, anyway, the chairman would be a man, which would of course take care of the situation.

So a caucus was called, and the Grand Opera House, which holds six hundred human beings, and about a hundred boys in the front seats, was jammed until it bulged. We knew that no woman could out-argue our seasoned old politicians, and when Calvin Briggs, who has planned all the inside work in the congressional district for twenty years, got up and showed just why woman ought not to intrude, there was an abashed silence all over the house, until Emma Madigan, who is a town character and does just as she pleases, got up. She stood up about fifty-nine seconds after Briggs had got a good start, and she argued with him as follows:

"That's all right, Mr. Briggs — You can't make me sit down, Mr. Chairman,

you nor any of you politicians — You're a fine man to talk about schools, Mr. Briggs. No, I won't stop. You know a lot about children, don't you, coming up here with tobacco juice all over your shirt front; and why don't you pay some taxes before you get up here and tell how to run a town? All right, Chairman, I'm done."

But so was Briggs. We couldn't help laughing at him. Editor Simpson, who runs the *Argus*, stepped into the breach and regretted greatly that so disgraceful an attack had been made upon a well-beloved citizen by a woman. No man would dare make such an attack, he opined. Then Emma got up again. The chairman called her to order, but he might as well have rapped down the rising tide.

"I know mighty well no man 'ud dare say what I did, Lafe Simpson," she shouted. "'Nd you're the biggest coward of 'em all. If you thought you'd have to lose the

school printing, you'd vote for the devil for president of the school board."

Of course it was perfectly disgraceful, but what could we do? Emma was a woman. We couldn't throw her out. We couldn't even get her to listen to parliamentary rules. And the worst of it was, she was telling the truth. That was something no one presumes to tell in local elections. To do it breaks the first commandment of politics; but what do the women, bless 'em, care for our commandments?

The president of the school board at that time was Sanford Jones. He was a large party who panned out about ninety-five per cent. solemnity and the rest water on the brain. At this point in the proceedings he judged it best to rise and turn the subject by telling us why woman should stay at home. He got about two hundred words into circulation before Emma got up. Her scandalized women

friends tried to pull her down, and Pelty Amthorne yelled "whoa," but she was in politics to stay.

"You look mighty fine standing up there, Mr. Jones," she shouted, "and tellin' us women to go back home where we belong. But I just want to tell this here crowd to-night that if you wasn't tighter than the bark on a tree, your wife wouldn't have to do her own washing.

"That's why you want her to home. So you can save money."

After that a gloom fell over the meeting, and as no one else seemed to care to speak, people began adjourning on all sides of Emma. After every one else had gone she adjourned. There was no further attempt to hold a caucus that year, and even now when any school faction desires to get together and discuss things, it carefully conceals the news from Miss Madigan.

That was just one of the many little surprises woman has handed to us in

Homeburg politics. Since they've gotten interested in school affairs, it beats all how much influence they've got. Take Sadie Askinson for instance. Her husband wanted to run for member of the school board, and Sadie didn't want him to, because he was away from home enough nights anyway, goodness knows. Sim was stubborn, and said the night before election that he was going down and have some ballots printed, anyway, and run. But he didn't, because that night Sadie cut every button off of every garment he had and threw them down into the well. When the kindergarten business came up about ten years ago, old Colonel Ackley hung out against it on the board. Said he wasn't going to stand for wasting the people's money on such foolishness. But he did, because the Young Ladies' Vigilance Society came and wept upon his shoulder. It was organized for that purpose, and after the seventh young lady

had soaked up Ackley's coat, he said he'd either vote for kindergarten or leave town, and he didn't care much which.

Mrs. Wert Payley, who really runs our school system and once marred her proud record by defeating a good school superintendent because he didn't give her daughter good marks, says the English suffragettes are poor sticks and don't know how to demand the ballot. "If the Homeburg women were ready to go after any more ballot than we have now," says she, "would we fool away time getting arrested? Not much! We'd turn our attention to the men. Every Homeburg woman would take care of her husband and argue with him. Maybe all the men in town would find 'Votes for Women' in place of their dinners on the table one night, and sewed on to their coats the next morning. Maybe they would get cornmeal mush for thirty days, and maybe, if any he politician presumed to get ob-

noxious, he would be dealt with on the public street by a committee. I know Homeburg, I think, and before Calvin Briggs would stand for the guying he would receive after half a dozen women had gone down on their knees to him and grabbed him around the legs so he couldn't get away, he'd go out of politics. Suffragettes? Bah! What do they know about it? I'd just like to know how long our men-folks in Homeburg would hold out if we women were to get sick some fine morning and remain hopeless invalids until we got the ballot. Why, if Wert Payley presumed to deny me the ballot, I wouldn't think of parading about it. I'd just have the girl starch his underwear for about two months, and if that didn't fetch him, I'd start cleaning house and quit in the middle. The men will give you anything, if you ask them the right way."

All of this makes us shiver, because we don't know just how long it will be before

the Homeburg women do make up their minds to have more ballot. But when they do, we'll brace up like men and give it to them if the State will let us. We just naturally hate to disappoint our womenfolks.

XII

CHRISTMAS AT HOMEBURG

And What It Means

NOW don't urge me to stay longer, Jim, because I'm going to anyway. Just to prove it, I'll take another of those gold-corseted cigars of yours, which would elevate me from the masses to the classes in three puffs if I smoked it back home. I didn't begin telling you how much I have enjoyed myself because I intended to go and wanted to start the soft music. I just wanted to begin on the job, that was all. It's going to take me an hour, at least, to tell you and Mrs. Jim what this meal has meant for me.

Oh, I know there have been better meals

in history perhaps. I suppose now and then a king gets real hungry and orders up a feed that might have a shade on this one — just a shade. That's as far as I'll compromise, Mrs. Jim. You needn't argue the matter. I'm a regular mule in my opinions. But if you had given me crackers and cheese, and old, decrepit flexible crackers at that, it would have been all the same. I'd have devoured them with awe and thanksgiving, and I'd have marveled at my luck. Here it is Christmas Day, and while half a million strangers in New York have been eating their hearts along with the regular bill of fare at boarding-houses and restaurants, I have been grabbed up and taken into an actual home where they have a Christmas tree!

I always was lucky, Jim. Every time I fell out of a tree in my youth, I landed on my head or some other soft spot, but this beats any luck I ever had. Think of it! Me sitting around in the sub-cellar

of gloom yesterday afternoon with my family a thousand miles away, and deciding to go to Boston for Christmas just because I'd have to travel ten hours and that would be some time killed; and then, when I went to my boarding-house for a clean collar, you called me up, just as I was leaving. There's a special department of Providence working on my case. Got a permanent assignment. And you are a Deputy Angel, Mrs. Jim. Gratitude! You couldn't get my brand of gratitude anywhere. They don't keep it in stock. Say the word and I will go back and eat a third piece of mince pie, and die for you.

I don't want to seem critical. It's hard for me to criticize anything right now, anyway, I'm so soaked and soused in contentment. I always strive to admit all of New York's good points, and I've gotten a job here largely to encourage the old town and help it along. But I do think that in one respect New York is in the bush league,

so to speak. Even with such people as you to help, you can't get much Christmas out of it. When I think of Homeburg to-day, I feel proud and haughty. You can beat us on most everything else, but when it comes to Christmas, we can't notice you. You don't compete.

Christmas in this town is only a feat. It's a race against time in two heats. If you win the first one, you get your shopping done on the day before. If you win the second, you get through Christmas Day, before your patience and good spirits give out. Of course, New Yorkers, like yourselves, who indulge in families and other old customs, have a mighty good time out of it. Christmas with a family is great anywhere on earth. But that isn't New York's fault. If you didn't have a family, you would be dining out or going to some matinée or sitting around watching the clock. That's where it is your solemn duty to envy Homeburg if you

never have done it before. And that's why I would be homesick to-day if you had fed me four dinners, Mrs. Jim, and had been a whole covey, or bevy, or flock, or constellation of angels — whichever is correct.

I don't mean to say that we get any more at Christmas than you do. We enjoy and endure our presents, same as any one else. And we have just as hard a time buying them. There aren't enough people in Homeburg to make a Christmas jam, but we have our own line of troubles. The question in Homeburg is not how to keep from spending so much money but how to spend what we have. The storekeepers don't pamper us. In fact they are severe with us. If we don't buy what they offer the first year, they store it up, and we have to take it the next Christmas. When the Homeburg storekeepers have had a bad season, it's up to us to go back the next year and face the same old line

of junk, knowing it will be there until we give in and buy it. There are two Christmas gift edition copies of Trilby still on sale in Homeburg, and Sam Green the druggist has had a ten-dollar manicure set on sale for ten years now. He won't get another, either. Says he was stung on the first one, and he's going to get his money back before he goes in any deeper. It goes down about fifty cents a year in price, and last year Jim Reebe almost bought it at four dollars and seventy-five cents for Selma Snood. We have hopes of him this year — unless he and Selma quarrel or get married, either of which will be fatal.

No, we have our troubles, same as you do, and Homeburg is full, on the day before Christmas, of worried fathers who duck into the stores about seven P. M. and try to buy enough stuff to eat up a ten dollar bill before the doors close. But that's a minor detail. What makes me love our Christmas is its communism.

Christmas isn't a family rite in Homeburg. It's a town festival, a cross between Home-coming Week and a general amnesty celebration.

People come home for Christmas all over the world, but in Homeburg you don't merely come home to your family, you come home to the whole town. A week before the twenty-fifth the clans begin to gather. Usually the college folks come first. Sometimes we have as many as a dozen, and the whole town is on edge to see them. It's next to a circus parade in interest because you never can tell what new sort of clothes the boys are going to spring on us. In the grand old days when DeLancey Payley and Sam Singer used to blow in for Christmas, they walked up from the depot between double lines of admirers, and their clothes never failed to strike us with awe. I remember the year when Sam came home with one of those overcoats with a sort of hood effect

In Homeburg you come home to the whole town. *Page* 284.

in the back. I never saw one before or since. He was also wearing a felt hat as flat as a soup plate that year and a two-quart pipe fitted carefully into his face, and when old Bill Dorgan, the drayman, saw him, he threw up both hands and cried, "My gosh, it ain't possible!"

Then the children begin coming back. There is a great difference between Homeburg and New York regarding children. In New York a child is personal property. But in Homeburg a child belongs to the whole town. A birth notice is a real news item in Homeburg. I suppose every baby is personally inspected by at least two hundred citizens. We criticize their care and feeding, suggest spanking when they are a little older, quiver unanimously with horror when they begin to "flip" freight trains, or get scarlet fever, and watch them grow up as eagerly as you New Yorkers watched the Woolworth Building. When they are graduated from high school we

are all there with bouquets and presents, and we have an equity in the whole brood. Molly Strawn, the washerwoman's daughter, got more flowers than any one last year. And when they leave town to get a job, if they are boys, or when some rude outsider breaks in with a marriage license and despoils us of them, if they are girls, we all feel the loss.

That's why Christmas means so much more to us. At Christmas time the town children come home. Will Askinson comes home from Chicago. He's doing very well up there, and it takes him two hours to get the length of Main Street on the first day after he arrives. Every one has to hear about it. Sadie Gastit comes home from Des Moines with a baby; regular custom of hers. Sometimes she makes the same baby do for two years, but usually it's a new one. I remember Sadie when she was only knee high to a grasshopper, and her mother spanked her for

climbing the Republican flagpole during the McKinley campaign. The Flint children come down from Chicago to visit their aunt. There were only a boy and girl when they left fifteen years ago. Now there are eleven, counting wife, husband, and acquisitions. Last year Ad Bridge brought a new wife home from Denver to show us. Year before last Miss Annie Simms, who has been teaching in Minneapolis, brought down a young man to show to her family. She was going to be exclusive about it, but did it work? Not much. She had to show him all around. We just happened over there in droves. Everybody loves Annie and we were afraid for a little while that she was going to be an old maid. The young man will bring her down this year I suppose. They were married last June.

All the Homeburg children and grandchildren arrive in the last two days before Christmas. They go home to their folks

to deposit their baggage, and then they all come down-town to the post-office, to get the mail ostensibly but in reality to shake hands all around. The day before Christmas is one long reception on Main Street. The old town fairly hums.

As a matter of fact, Christmas is a good deal like a Union Depot. The approaches are the most important part of it. By the day before Christmas every one is feeling so good that things begin to happen. People whom you have never suspected of caring for you come up to your office and leave things — cigars, and toys for the children, and Christmas cards. Men with whom you have quarreled during the year shake hands violently all around a circle on the street, and when they come to you they grab yours, too; and you begin to talk elaborately as if nothing had happened — a good deal like two women wading through a formal call; and it makes you feel so good that pretty soon

you buy a box of Colorado Durable cigars and you go over to the office of some man for whom you have cherished an undying hatred, because he didn't vote for you for the school board. You peek in his door, and if he isn't there you go in and leave the cigars with your compliments.

There's never been a Christmas at home when I haven't been operated on for a grouch of this sort, and most always it comes the day before. If I had my way there wouldn't be any Christmas — only the day before. On the day before you're so tickled over what the other folks are going to get from you, and so full of pleased anticipation over what you may get from the others, that good humor just bursts out all over you like spring waters from the mountainside.

On Christmas Eve in Homeburg we all go to the Exercises to hear the children perform. They build churches in Homeburg with big doors, so that they can get

big Christmas trees in them, and we grown-ups go early in order to hear the kids squeal with wonder when they come in and see those thirty-foot miracles in candles and tinsel, down in front.

Homeburg children are divided into two classes — those who get all of their presents on the church Christmas trees and have to worry through the next day without any additional excitement, and those who have to sit through the Christmas Eve exercises with only a sack of candy to sustain them and who land heavily the next day. The discussion as to which is the better way has raged for a generation, anyway; at least my chum and I discussed it every year when we were boys, he adhering to the Christmas tree plan, and I to the homemade Christmas. And last year, when he came back, we began it all over again, he claiming it was cruel for me to make my children wait until Christmas Day, and I pitying his poor young-

sters for getting done with Christmas before it began.

Anyway, Christmas Eve is a grand occasion in the churches, and every year I notice with amazement that some youngster whom I remember as having been formally introduced to society through her birth notice only a few weeks ago, seems to me, has gotten large enough to get up on the platform and speak a piece. They do it at the most unheard-of ages. I believe there are two-year-old orators in the Congregational Sunday school. I get a good deal of suspense out of some of your baseball games here, especially when Chicago plays you, but the most suspense per individual I've ever noticed has been in these Christmas Eve exercises when some youngster just high enough to step over a crack in the floor gets up to recite a piece, and fourteen parents and relatives lean forward and forget to breathe until he has gotten his forty words out, wrong end

to, and has been snatched off the stage by his relieved mother.

Competition gets into everything, and it has marred our Christmas exercises a little lately. The Methodists are growing fast and are very ambitious. A few years ago they rented the Opera House, put in two Christmas trees, with a real fireplace between and a Santa Claus who came out of it, and charged ten cents admission. That embittered us Congregationalists. It smacked of commercialism to us, and we would not budge an inch — besides, there wasn't another Opera House to rent. So, nowadays, our spirit of good-fellowship on Christmas Eve is sort of absent-minded and anxious. We are always counting up our attendance and sizing up our tree, and then sliding over to the Opera House and looking over the Methodist layout. Sometimes we beat them, but generally they have a regular mass meeting and make a barrel of money. Last year they

turned people away and brought Santa Claus on the stage in a real automobile. We were so jealous that we could hardly cool down in time for Christmas dinner.

As a matter of fact, the only unimportant part of our Christmas season is Christmas Day itself. It is a sort of hiatus in the great doings. When we go home on Christmas Eve, it is with a great peace. We have bought our presents. We have greeted all the returned prodigals. We have made up with a few carefully selected enemies. Our children have spoken their pieces successfully at the Exercises, and have gotten a good start on the job of eating their way through a young mountain range of mixed candies and nuts. All the hustle and worry is over, and we are unanimously happy. The week following Christmas will be one dizzy round of parties and teas for the visitors, and Homeburg will be a delightful place full of the friends of boyhood, with

an average of one reunion every fifteen minutes in and out of business hours. But on Christmas Day nothing will happen except the dinner. We'll get our presents in the morning, and then at noon the great crisis will come. We'll either conquer the dinner, or it will conquer us.

You know how it is, Jim, because that's the kind of dinner you had to-day. It was an Athletic Feat — not the ordinary kind of city dinner where you save up carefully during seven courses, and finish strong on the water crackers and cheese, but a real Christmas gorge. Every time I sit down to a Christmas dinner in Homeburg, I feel more strongly than ever that each guest should have his capacity stenciled on him. They are more careful of box cars in this country than they are of humans. You never see a box car that doesn't have "Capacity, 100,000 lbs." stenciled on its sides. And they don't overload that car. There have been times

when, if I could have had "Capacity, two turkey thighs, one wish-bone, trimmings, and two pieces of pie" stenciled on me, I would have gotten along better. I think they ought to try to make these Olympic games more useful to our nation by instituting a Christmas dinner marathon. If we have to eat for two hours and a quarter, top speed, once or twice a year, we ought to train up to the task as a nation.

I always feel a little bit nervous about Christmas dinner before it comes, but I never shirk. As a matter of fact, it isn't really dangerous. As far as I know, no one has ever actually exploded in Homeburg on Christmas Day, and we all seem to get away with the job in pretty fair shape. But it spoils the day for anything else. The town is full, in the afternoon, of partially paralyzed men lying around on sofas in a comatose condition, like anacondas sleeping off their bi-monthly lunch. Homeburg is absolutely dead for the rest

of the day. If a fire broke out on Christmas afternoon, I don't believe even Chief Dobbs would have the energy to get up and put on his helmet. It's hard on the exiled men who just run down for Christmas Day from the cities. They don't get in on anything but the eating. Sam Frazier struck last year. Said he wasn't going to pay ten dollars fare and incidentals any more, to come down from Chicago on Christmas Day for an all-afternoon view of his brother's feet as said brother lay piled up on the sofa. He was going to come down after this on the Fourth of July.

It doesn't affect the women so badly because they don't eat so much. They haven't time. It takes two women to steer one child safely through a Christmas dinner, anyway, and about three to get the ruins cleared away in time to get up a light lunch in the evening for the reviving hosts. If there is any one time

when I would care less to be a woman than at any other time, it is on Christmas afternoon, when her men-folks have gone to sleep and have left her with a few cross children and a carload of Christmas dinner fragments for company.

That's where you city folks with your servant problem have the best of us, and I'll not dispute it, Mrs. Jim. On the other hand, the nicest part of our Homeburg Christmas is the fact that, when we fold our tired hands over our bulging vests after dinner and lie down to rest, we know that there is no starving family in Homeburg which has had to celebrate Christmas by taking on an extra drink of water and indulging in a long, succulent sniff at a restaurant door.

We have poor people in Homeburg, but we haven't any poverty problem at Christmas. It's a strictly local issue, and it is handled by the neighbors. Having lived a long time in the city, Jim, you may not

know what a neighbor is. It's a person who lives close to you and takes a personal interest in your affairs. A good neighbor is a woman whose heart is so large that she has had to annex a lot of outlying territory around the family real estate in order to fill it. No Homeburg woman would think of constructing an extraordinarily fine pie without sending a cut over to her nearest neighbor.

About Christmas time we are especially busy neighboring in Homeburg, and any family which lives near us and isn't going very strong on the Christmas game, because of sickness or trouble, is our meat. It would be an insult to go across the town and help a family in some other neighbor's territory, and that was what got Editor Simpson of the *Argus* into trouble a couple of years ago.

Simpson is a young man, a comparative newcomer from the city, and a very earnest and enterprising party. He runs the *Argus*

on the high gear and is never so happy as when he is promoting a public movement in real city style. It occurred to Simpson three years ago that Homeburg ought not to be behind Chicago in anything, especially at Christmas time, and so he started a " Good-fellow " movement. They were running it strong in Chicago that year. Any man who wished to be a " Good Fellow " sent his name to the " Good-fellow Editor " and offered to provide a Christmas for one or more poor children. It was a grand idea, stuffed full of sentiment, and we Homeburg men just naturally ate it up. When the day before Christmas came, seventy-five " Good Fellows " were on Simpson's list, and they had offered to take care of one hundred and twenty-five children, to give each a real Christmas. Simp's office was full of groceries and toys, applicants were clamoring for children, all was excitement and enthusiasm — and then a horrible state

of affairs was disclosed. Simpson hadn't provided any children. There was a bleak and distressing lack of material for us to work upon. In all Homeburg there weren't ten families who were going without Christmas turkey, or its equivalent, and in each one of these cases some neighbor had sternly ordered Simp to keep his hands off and mind his own affairs. There we were — seventy-five Good Fellows with boatloads of cheer and no way to dispose of it. The only person we could find in all the town to descend on was Pat Ryan. We smothered him in groceries, and he ate himself into biliousness that night and had to have a doctor for three days, which helped some, but not much. On the whole, it was a dismal failure.

What! Nine o'clock? Excuse me, Jim. I seem to have taken root here. No; I am going this time. Back to my room with Christmas all gotten through with, thank goodness and you folks. You under-

stand. You've made it as nice for me as any two magicians could have done, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. But it's my last Christmas in New York, I hope. Next month the wife and children come on, and by next Christmas, if I have any luck at all, we'll join the happy army that swoops down on Homeburg for the holidays. My, but it will be funny to look at the old town from the outside in! Me — a visitor in Homeburg!

Do you know what prosperity is to a whole mob of city people, Jim? It's the ability to pack up their families and go off to some Homeburg or other for Christmas. And do you know what makes city people successful, in Homeburg opinion? It's coming back every year. And if we made a million apiece, and didn't preserve enough of the old home-town love to come back, we wouldn't be successful in their eyes, not by a long way. Well, good-by, philanthropists. And, thank you, I can't come

again next year. I'm saving up to go home. That's what makes this cigar taste so good, Jim. Last one I'll smoke until carfare is in the bank.

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